

Chapter 3

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York

"Nobody wants to be called 'at risk.' We need to serve kids not on the basis of their potential as criminals and pregnant teens but on who they are as people."²⁵

Luis Garden Acosta

Founder

El Puente Arts and Cultural Center and Academy for Peace and Justice

Introduction

The El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice in Brooklyn, New York provides an excellent example of a school strong in its mission and community partnerships. The academy was founded in 1993 and is an offspring of the El Puente Arts and Cultural Center founded in 1982 by Luis Garden Acosta and a group of community activists in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn.²⁶ The Center was founded in response to a surge of violence in the Williamsburg neighborhood the previous year that resulted in 48 youth deaths.²⁷ It is difficult to describe the impact of El Puente without including the relationships between the Center and the Academy in this analysis.²⁸ El Puente, which means bridge in Spanish, aims to bridge differences among races, cultures, economic classes, and communities to promote community development, voter participation, racial healing and human rights. In addition, El Puente operates a community health

²⁵ Former website of the White House under President Clinton; One America – El Puente. URL: http://clinton4.nara.gov/Initiatives/OneAmerica/Practices/pp_19980930.6001.html

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to El Puente Arts and Cultural Center as The Center and to the El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice as The Academy. When referring to both organizations, I will address them as El Puente.

center that offers vaccinations for children and focuses on family health and AIDS-related issues.²⁹

The Academy was the first of its kind focusing on human rights. Above and beyond the basic essentials that most public high schools offer to their ninth to twelfth grade students, the Academy has customized its curriculum to produce community-minded graduates who are accountable to their communities. Currently, the New York City Public Schools 2000-2001 Annual School Report shows that 146 students are enrolled in the Academy.³⁰ The same report shows that the school is 87% Hispanic and 12% Black. The demographics of this school are similar to those of the Lawrence Public Schools. This affinity is one of the main reasons I chose to include this school as a case study.

El Puente is also unique in that it is housed in a former Catholic Church that once served as an opera house.³¹ The staff shares in the commitment to producing community-minded citizens from the student body. New students work with a staff member to create an individualized plan for the length of their career at the Academy. Daily after-school programs in arts, media, graphic design, and dance enrich the classroom learning experience. These programs involve the students not only in their school but more importantly in their community.

²⁹ Former website of the White House under President Clinton; One America – El Puente. URL: http://clinton4.nara.gov/Initiatives/OneAmerica/Practices/pp_19980930.6001.html

³⁰ New York City Public Schools, 2000-2001 Annual School Report, El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, [online report] page 2. URL: <http://www.nycenet.edu/daa/01asr/376685.pdf?>

The Academy also strives to involve parents. One method of parent involvement is through School Leadership Teams. These are mandated by the New York City Board of Education and act as democratic and representative bodies that work together to plan and effect change on the schools they are associated with.³² These teams are required to have at least 50% representation from parents and can also consist of elected student and community representatives. The remainder of the team consists of teachers, the school principal, staff, United Federation of Teachers chapter leader, and the Parent Association president. This unique leadership and governance structure allows the schools to have a degree of autonomy from the Board of Education.

Mission and connection to community

The mission of this innovative academy is the following:

“El Puente Academy strives to achieve mastery in learning while nurturing leadership for peace and justice. Our integrated curriculum is project-based, academically rigorous and community focused. We provide internships, a comprehensive extended day program, college/vocational preparatory support and a comprehensive arts-in-education program.”³³

The strength of El Puente Academy lies in its connection to its community with innovative programs and relationship building. It is this connection that increases the effectiveness of this institution. Situated in Brooklyn, a diversity of support is necessary in order for The Center and The Academy to carry out their missions. Partnerships

³¹ 1999 Coming Up Taller Awards Winners, El Puente Arts and Cultural Center.

URL: <http://www.cominguptaller.org/awards-1999/program8.html>

³² NYC School Leadership Teams, About NYCSLT. URL: <http://www.nycslt.org/aboutslt.html#top>

³³ The New York City Board of Education, El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice. URL: http://www.nycenet.edu/hs_directory/brooklyn/EI%20Puente_Academy_for_Peace_and_Justice.htm

have been made in key areas such as environmental justice, the arts, public health, open space, and education. These areas of focus are also then reflected in their curriculum.

Community Partnerships

- *CAFÉ (Community Alliance for the Environment)*

This organization was the result of a successful organizing campaign that stopped the Brooklyn Navy Yard from being redeveloped as a solid waste incinerator.³⁴ The success of this coalition went beyond stopping another pollution-creating industry from infecting the Williamsburg neighborhood. This coalition was an unprecedented alliance between the historically feuding Hispanic and Hasidic communities in the Williamsburg neighborhood. It also included the Polish, Italian and black communities. Luis Garden Acosta, the founder of El Puente, described the day Rabbi David Niederman agreed to attend a meeting at El Puente as “an historic moment” given the history of the neighborhood.³⁵ The result was an alliance of 1,200 Hassidic, Latino, Black and White ethnic Americans committed to environmental justice.

³⁴ Community University Consortium for Regional Environmental Justice. Case Study: El Puente & the Struggle Against the Navy Yard Incinerator in Brooklyn, NYC. URL: http://newarkwww.rutgers.edu/~gelobter/cucrej/html/epcase_story.html

³⁵ United States Environmental Protection Agency Region 2. History: EPA and the Environment – 1970 – 1995. URL: <http://www.epa.gov/region02/epd/history.htm#acosta>

- *New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYCEJA)*

NYCEJA links grassroots organizations in low-income and communities of color in their fight against environmental racism.³⁶ The Academy is a member of this 14-member, citywide alliance.

- *Organization of Waterfront Neighborhoods (OWN)*

OWN is another citywide coalition of community-based organizations although it focuses on the threat to public health posed by solid waste transfer stations.³⁷ El Puente is a member of this 22-member coalition.

- *NYC Coalition to End Lead Poisoning (NYCCELP)³⁸*

El Puente is a member of this political advocacy alliance that is fighting to eliminate child and labor lead poisoning hazards in New York City.

- *CIET (Community Information and Epidemiological Technologies)*

CIET is an international group of organizations devoted to bringing the community voice to planning and effective governance. They accomplish this mission by equipping communities with data gathering tools necessary to make informed decisions about policies of concern to their communities. El Puente has collaborated on numerous projects with CIET including asthma and child nutrition studies in Williamsburg.

³⁶ NYC Environmental Justice Alliance, Membership. URL: <http://www.nyceja.org/membership.html>

³⁷ Consumer's Union, Nonprofit Publisher of Consumer Reports.
URL: <http://www.consumersunion.org/other/trash/about.htm>

- **651 Arts**

651 Arts is a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing programs of African and African American artistic expression to American audiences. It was founded in 1988 and has since grown to not only support performances throughout Brooklyn, but also provide support for promising artists and build relationships with local community-based arts programs. Since 1995, 651 Arts has supported the Neighborhood Arts Network that is a coalition of community-based cultural institutions in the Brooklyn area, of which El Puente is a member. In 1998, the El Puente Academy presented a theatrical performance called *Garments* which was a look at the fashion world and its relationship to sweatshops.³⁹ In addition, the Academy partnered with 651 Arts in the 1994-1995 season to produce *Celebración*, a celebration of salsa music with legendary performers which also included workshops and seminars for children.⁴⁰

- **Center for Children and Technology (CCT)**

CCT is a non-profit organization created by the Bank Street College of Education in 1980 to address the issue of technology and learning and the impacts it has on children, families, and communities.⁴¹ El Puente was one of several community organizations involved in CCT's Access By Design Project. One of the goals of the project was to "craft a national agenda to increase equity and diversity in the

³⁸ Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, New York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning. URL: <http://www.nmic.org/nycceip/news/news.htm>

³⁹ 651 Arts, Neighborhood Arts Network. URL: http://www.651arts.org/inside/neighborhood_network.shtml

⁴⁰ 651 Arts, Our History, Timeline, 1994-1995 Season. URL: http://www.651arts.org/inside/our_history.shtml

⁴¹ Education Development Center, CCT, About CCT. URL: <http://www2.edc.org/CCT/cctweb/about.html>

deployment and design of technology.”⁴² The same report shows that students at El Puente were engaged in a critique of technology and the way it is designed to visualize what technology might be if it is not designed by technology professionals.

- *The Parks Council*

El Puente is a member of The Parks Council that is a coalition of civic, open space, and economic development organizations that advocate for a high standard of parks and recreation services in the City of New York.⁴³

- *Consensus Organizing Institute (COI)*

COI is an organization dedicated to bringing together leaders representing diverse constituencies to organize together and effect change. When El Puente was involved with the Brooklyn Navy Yard campaign, COI helped organize the leaders from the various stakeholder groups.⁴⁴

- *Musica Against Drugs (MAD)*

MAD is a Brooklyn-based program created to improve the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS rooted in Latino culture and heritage.⁴⁵ Together with El Puente, the organizations educate the school and community about HIV/AIDS-related issues and provide referrals to services.

⁴² Education Development Center, CCT, Projects, Access By Design, paragraph 1. URL: <http://www2.edc.org/CCT/cctweb/project/descrip.asp?21>

⁴³ The Parks Council Homepage. URL: <http://www.parkscouncil.org>

⁴⁴ The Consensus Organizing Model. URL: http://www.cpn.org/cpn/COI/coi_model.html

⁴⁵ Hispanic Federation, Latinos Unidos Contra El SIDA Member Agencies, Musica Against Drugs. URL: <http://www.hispanicfederation.org/luces.htm>

- *New Visions for Public Schools (NVPS)*

NVPS is an educational reform organization working to improve the quality of education in New York City public schools.⁴⁶ NVPS is the organization that helped create the Academy in 1993. The agency works with the stakeholders involved in improving educational opportunities for students including parents, community groups, educators, and public and private leaders.

Together, these partnerships contribute to the betterment of the community through the power of coalitions. When it comes time to organize the community in support of a program or cause, coalitions such as these can add tremendous power and strength to affect change.

Academic Advancement

One of the goals of the Academy is to equip students with the skills necessary to attend post-secondary institutions and return as professionals to help improve the Williamsburg community. The Academy achieves this through the following:

- Tutoring: PSAT/SAT Prep
- College and Vocational Counseling and Placement
- Internships and College Programs

Non-academic activities help round out individuals and also contribute to excellence in college. The Academy gives students the opportunity to participate in extracurricular

⁴⁶ New Visions for Public Schools, About NVPS. URL: <http://www.newvisions.org/about/>

activities including pre-professional training in dance, music, chorus, fine arts, media, and music production; sports; paid/volunteer internships; men's/women's groups; and community development projects.⁴⁷

Lessons for Lawrence

El Puente demonstrates how a school with a mission of social justice can form partnerships with community organizations that share in their mission to work towards this goal. The power of these partnerships is in the diversity of interests including arts, culture, environmental justice, HIV/AIDS issues, technology, and open space advocacy. If the New Holy Rosary School builds a broad support coalition like El Puente, it can help promote student involvement in their school and community. These partnerships can help students think about the roles they play in the various communities they are a part of including their school, neighborhood, and ethnic community. The relationship between El Puente Arts and Cultural Center and the Academy provides another learning point. LCW can benefit from a strong connection to the New Holy Rosary School. The school community can be used to better organize the community and inform them about issues that affect their neighborhood.

Summary

The El Puente Academy for Peace and Social Justice builds strength by being grounded in its community and being an active member in its development. The

⁴⁷ New York City Board of Education, Brooklyn High Schools, El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice. URL: http://www.nycenet.edu/hs_directory/brooklyn/El%20Puente_Academy_for_Peace_and_Justice.htm

success of the Academy can be measured in concrete and abstract benefits to the students and the surrounding community. From the class of 2001, 80% graduated and even more impressive, 90% of these graduates have plans to attend a 4-year (46.7%) or a 2-year (43.3%) college.⁴⁸ The same report shows that citywide, there was a 51% graduation rate with 67.7% of these graduates with 2- or 4-year college plans. At the same time, the Academy succeeds in blurring the line between community and school. Many public schools act as islands in the communities they are a part of but El Puente becomes engaged with its community and works to improve it. Through community partnerships, El Puente eliminates redundancy and works with organizations that are good at what they do. It is impossible and absurd for one institution or organization to be effective at everything. It is better to partner with organizations that excel in a diverse set of skills where the sum of these organizations makes each one stronger.

⁴⁸ New York City Public Schools, 2000-2001 Annual School Report, El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, [online report] page 12. URL: <http://www.nycenet.edu/daa/01asr/376685.pdf?>

Chapter 4

Salomé Ureña Middle Academies, Intermediate School 218 Washington Heights, New York City

Introduction

The Salomé Ureña Middle Academies, Intermediate School 218M (IS 218) was established in 1991 through a partnership between the New York City Board of Education, Community School District 6, and the Children's Aid Society. The school serves grades 5-8, has a student body population of 1,684, and a staff of 92.⁴⁹ The school's name is in recognition of Salomé Ureña de Henríquez, a feminist poet, educator, and founder of the first school for girls in the Dominican Republic in 1881.⁵⁰ The school excels in providing on-site services to youth through innovative curricular and extracurricular programs. IS 218 is an excellent example of a learning institution that houses educational, social, and health services for families. It is able to provide such a diversity of services by integrating school-day activities with extended-day programs and staying open until 10 PM.⁵¹ Parental involvement and inclusion is achieved through the Family Resource Center (described below) and through parent volunteers in the school and the clinic where parents are trained to give hearing and vision tests.⁵² The two greatest strengths of this school are the extended-day programs and the on-site health services for the community.

⁴⁹ Board of Education, City of New York. Salomé Ureña Middle Academies, Intermediate School 218M. <http://www.cognivision.com/district6/is218.htm>

⁵⁰ Community School Fact Sheet, Intermediate School 218, page 1; www.childrensaidsociety.org/media/general/cas-IS_218.pdf

⁵¹ North Central Regional Educational Laboratory; URL: <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/le3newyk.htm>

One of the main successes of this school is the strong commitment and partnership between the school and the Children's Aid Society (CAS). These two stakeholders share responsibility and physical space in a long-term commitment to improve the educational opportunities for the students who attend IS 218. A healthy relationship is maintained by splitting the responsibilities of a typical day. The school system assumes most of the responsibility for the classroom learning while CAS leads the extended-day learning programs.⁵³ The experience and lessons CAS has gained in creating these community schools has been compiled into a useful manual for agencies interested in creating a community school. The CAS manual adds that the two partners work closely together so that the extended day programs will reinforce what is being learned in the classroom. In my experience with working with young people, this overlap is an important method of maintaining interest in the subjects being taught in school. When students are able to apply classroom learning to concepts or ideas outside of the classroom, they are more prone to learning the concept and applying it to more parts of their lives.

In addition to the strong bond with CAS, the school has established key partnerships with other prominent New York institutions such as Mount Sinai Hospital, New York University, Columbia University, Mercy College, New York City Opera, the Broadway Theater Institute, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Company, and the American Ballet

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ The Children's Aid Society. *Building A Community School*. Third Edition. [online book], September 2001; page 36-37. URL: http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/comm_school_form/

Theatre.⁵⁴ Some of the programs created through these partnerships will be described later in this chapter. Together, these partnerships allow the school to provide a wide array of programs and services to its students, their families, and the surrounding community.

Mission

The mission of IS 218 is the following:

- “Prepare our students to meet the highest standards and challenges of life through an academically challenging curriculum;
- Bring all students to their full potential through the cooperative efforts of family and faculty, and;
- Engage our students in activities which prepare them to become productive individuals of their school and community.”⁵⁵

Curriculum

IS 218 is divided into four academies which include Expressive Arts; Math, Science, and Technology; Community Service; and Business Studies and offer multiple courses to meet the interests and needs of the students.⁵⁶ As a whole, the academy champions small communities of learning, student advisory programs, a challenging core

⁵⁴ The Children's Aid Society. *Building A Community School*. Third Edition. [online book], September 2001; page 36. URL: http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/comm_school_form/

⁵⁵ Board of Education, City of New York. Salomé Ureña Middle Academies, Intermediate School 218M. <http://www.cognivision.com/district6/is218.htm>

⁵⁶ Community School Fact Sheet, Intermediate School 218, page 2; www.childrensaidsociety.org/media/general/cas-IS_218.pdf

curriculum, cooperative learning, and team teaching techniques.⁵⁷ The school, as a public school in New York City, must still adhere to the regulations of the New York City Board of Education, which include being a neighborhood-based school open to the students in the surrounding Washington Heights community.

Innovative Programs

- **Children's Aid Society (CAS) Community School**

CAS, as one of the principal partners investing in IS 218, administers a number of programs that serve the youth community of IS 218. The following is a list of these programs with a short description of each.

- *Project FUNDS (Fun Understanding Nickel and Dime Savings)*. Through a series of workshops with IS 218's Business Club, CAS teaches students about the history of money, personal budgeting, and investing skills.⁵⁸
- *National Technical Assistance Center for Community Schools (NTACCS)*
Created in 1994 and housed within IS 218, this center provides highly demanded technical assistance to schools and community organizations interested in creating community schools.⁵⁹ The center also advocates the community school movement on a local and national scale to bring attention to this approach and impact the larger educational reform agenda.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ The Children's Aid Society, Economic Empowerment Initiative;
http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/locations_services/servicesindex/educationandcommunity/

⁵⁹ The Children's Aid Society, National Technical Assistance Center for Community Schools;
http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/locations_services/servicesindex/educationandcommunity/techassis:ta nce/

- *Family Resource Center.* Caplan states the importance of a physical space for parents to have within community schools.⁶⁰ IS 218 with the help of CAS achieves this through the Family Resource Center. The center is described as a “comfortable, cozy first [point] of access for parents who need to wait for their children, socialize with their neighbors, look into adult education opportunities or get assistance with a specific problem.”⁶¹ The center also provides needed services such as help with immigration and naturalization forms and applications, English as a second language and GED classes, job counseling, emergency food aid, legal aid, and housing advocacy. It also provides fun and leisure activities including aerobics, drama, weight training, and computer training.

Further academic enrichment is achieved through other innovative programs such as the Laptop Computer Program, Dual Language & Inclusion Programs, Student Authors Program, Connected Math Program, Reading/Writing Workshop, and the Service Learning Program.

Extended-day Programs And Extracurricular Activities

The extended-day programs at IS 218 focus on enrichment and application of the school-day curriculum but they also enhance the students’ experience through programs in the arts, sports, and youth development. Through the Recycle-A-Bicycle Program, children learn how to repair donated or discarded bikes and then either donate the renovated bikes to charity or earn them for themselves.⁶² The Recycle-A-

⁶⁰ Caplan, Judith G. *Critical Issue: Constructing School Partnerships with Families and Community Groups.* [online article] North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998. URL: <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa400.htm>

⁶¹ The Children’s Aid Society, *Education and Community Schools*; URL: http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/locations_services/servicesindex/educationandcommunity/?#community?

⁶² The Children’s Aid Society. *Building A Community School.* Third Edition. [online book], September 2001; page 42. URL: http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/comm_school_form/

Computer program is similar where children recondition used computers for personal home use.⁶³ These two programs afford children the opportunity to apply their classroom learning in a hands-on format. Hard skills in math, finance, and science are strengthened while soft skills in personal responsibility, civic and community accountability, and sustainability are gained. The CAS book adds that other academic support programs include a debate club, chess club, community service projects and mentoring programs.

Arts and cultural programs at IS 218 provide students with opportunities for creative expression. The children can choose from theater projects, a dance class in conjunction with the American Ballet Theatre, cultural dance, hip hop classes, choral music, a string ensemble, a jazz band, art classes, crafts, culinary classes, and an African drumming class.⁶⁴ Programs such as these are important because youth often do not have outlets for creative expression at their schools. This can lead to unhealthy expressions through vandalism. In addition, in my experience, I have come across students who are very artistic and find a lack of stimulation in the daily routine of school. This lack of engagement can result in the students feeling that school isn't for them. If a school is not willing to provide outlets for a variety of interests – academic, artistic, athletic, etc. – then its students might lose respect for the school and interest in the curriculum.

⁶³ Ibid, page 42

⁶⁴ Ibid, page 43

In summer, the extended-day program at IS 218 includes a number of camp activities for the children. The school hosts a day camp, a teen day-trip program, a summer dance camp with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, and trips to the Children's Aid Society's country camps.⁶⁵

On-Site Health Services

The existence of on-site health services at IS 218 helps remove a barrier to care. One of the immediate goals of the clinic is to provide full medical and dental care for each child. In the long-term, the goal is "to address the relationship between health, academic, and emotional problems, and to meet the needs of the 'total child' at a location that is central to child and family life."⁶⁶ Before the clinic existed, Washington Heights had no public hospitals and one private hospital. Coupled with language barriers and the fact that many Washington Heights residents, many of them children, did not have health coverage further decreased access to care.⁶⁷ Today, IS 218 is one of five, of a total of nine, CAS community schools that provides health services to the community including medical, dental, and mental health. The doctors, nurse practitioners, and dentists come from the aforementioned New York institutions – Mount Sinai and Columbia University. In addition, IS 218 is home to an eye clinic that provides eye exams, CAS pays for glasses, and the State University of New York College of Optometry provides them.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid, page 43

⁶⁶ Ibid, page 45.

⁶⁷ Ibid, page 44.

⁶⁸ Ibid, page 44.

The Health Care Access Program is another method used by CAS to increase access to healthcare for the IS 218 community and the city as a whole. It is an effort to enroll children who are eligible for publicly funded health insurance but are not enrolled for reasons such as a lack of information, time, language barriers, and bureaucratic barriers.⁶⁹ A proactive recruitment strategy for this program is carried out through tactics such as reaching out to parents who visit the Family Resource Centers and at community events. By working towards healthy students, IS 218 is able to focus on giving educators the time to teach and healthy students the opportunity to learn.

Lessons for Lawrence

Intermediate School 218 has some key learning points that can be applied to the development of a community in Lawrence. It has taken many years to build up its capacity and LPS can benefit from its well-documented history. While it may not be possible to quickly find a resourceful partner such as CAS, LPS should begin looking for such an organization that can serve as a support center for the city's community schools. It should also send a representative to the National Technical Assistance Center for Community Schools to learn in more detail how to frame and implement the community school concept in Lawrence. The New Holy Rosary School can be the pilot school for the district.

LPS can also benefit from providing health services to its constituents. While the New Holy Rosary School may not have the space to house a health center as large as IS

218, it may be able to find an adjacent or nearby property to lease and use as a community health center.

Summary

IS 218 is an example of a partnership with an organization dedicated to urban school reform and how this relationship supports creative practices. IS 218 succeeds in being a public school that doubles as a community center. It does this by challenging existing notions of public schools. Academically, students are challenged with a rigorous curriculum based on time-tested standards as well as innovative approaches to hands-on learning. Outside of regular school hours students have the opportunity to enrich their academic learning or participate in arts and cultural activities that allow students to explore their other talents. Parents and other community members also benefit from adult learning opportunities and counseling in the evenings. By housing NTACCS, IS 218 is able to expose students to the latest ideas in community school learning environments. On-site health services provide one-stop convenience for students and their families to receive health care. More importantly, these health services improve access to care and promote learning opportunities by maintaining healthy students and families. One final important detail to note is that IS 218 is one of nine CAS-supported community schools in New York City's School District 6. This helps provide a continuum of care from the elementary schools, through the intermediate schools, and up to the high schools.

⁶⁹ Ibid, page 51.

Chapter 5

Holy Rosary School Lawrence, Massachusetts

Planning Process as an Opportunity

The redevelopment of the Holy Rosary School is a tremendous opportunity for LPS, the city, and the residents of the North Common neighborhood. This would be the first public school in Lawrence to be called a community school. Using the lessons learned from the redevelopment process of this school, LPS can begin following a similar participatory and partnership-rich strategy of school and community building.

The North Common neighborhood is the service area for LCW. Over the years LCW has established a trusting relationship with the residents of the North Common by organizing the community and working towards its revitalization. LCW has been involved in most, if not all, of the recent redevelopment in this neighborhood. This makes LCW an essential partner in the redevelopment of the Holy Rosary school. LPS should not rehabilitate this school without the input and expertise of LCW. LCW through its Reviviendo Planning Group initiated a community-based planning process and is trying to build a relationship with LPS. This relationship should be developed into a strong partnership so that it will be common practice for LPS to consult with not only LCW, but other community organizations as well, when it goes about planning and designing learning facilities in neighborhoods throughout Lawrence.

LCW, through its Reviviendo Planning Group, held its first community vision meeting in February of 2002. It was structured as a forum to introduce the idea of redeveloping the building into a community resource to the North Common residents, many of them former students of the Holy Rosary School. It began with a short introduction of the project and then turned into a group discussion where people provided their visions for the best use of this community asset. The participants quickly agreed it should be redeveloped as a community school and then brainstormed a long list of the characteristics and services it could provide. Two more meetings are planned, one in June and another later this year. Now that the use has been agreed upon by the community, the goal of the future meetings will be to have the community decide what the school will look like, what kinds of programs it will include, and what kinds of partnerships will be established to maintain a connection to the surrounding community. The key to the success of this process will be active participation and collaboration by LCW and LPS together.

Background of Lawrence Public Schools

Lawrence is a city very similar to industrial and immigrant-rich Paterson, New Jersey. It is nicknamed The Immigrant City due to its history of being a port of entry from the Irish during the Industrial Revolution to the recent arrival of Dominican, Puerto Rican, and most recently Vietnamese people. The public schools are a reflection of this diversity. Out of a total of 22 schools and a population of 12,807 students in 2001, the ethnic breakdown is as follows:⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Lawrence Public Schools, *District Comprehensive Educational Plan 2001-2002*. Page 2

LPS Proportional Student Population by Race/Ethnicity**N=12,807**

Race/ Ethnicity	2001
Black	2.8%
Hispanic	82.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.2%
White	11.3%

Since 1998, the same report shows that the Hispanic population has increased by 4.3% and the White population has decreased by 4.1%. Like Paterson, many students are being lost to private institutions of learning or are dropping out of the system altogether. The Massachusetts Department of Education (MassDOE) reports the adjusted dropout rate for 2000 in the Lawrence School District was 12.2% compared to 3.5% statewide.⁷¹ The same report shows adjacent towns to Lawrence with significantly lower rates. The rate in Andover is 0.7%, Methuen is 1.1%, Haverhill is 3.9%, and North Andover is 2.3%. MassDOE also sorts the dropout rate in Lawrence by race/ethnicity. The following table shows these figures:

LPS Adjusted Dropout Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 2000⁷²

Race/ Ethnicity	Enrolled	Adjusted Dropout Rate
African American	55	7.3%
Asian American	110	4.5%
Latino	1816	12.7%
Native American	3	not reported
White	144	13.2%

⁷¹ Massachusetts Department of Education, Dropout Rates in Massachusetts Public Schools, 1999-2000. URL: http://www.doe.mass.edu/ata/dropout/9900/ds/ds_hm.html#L Adjusted dropout rate is calculated by taking the total number of dropouts in a given year and subtracting the number of students who return to school and enroll by October 1 of the next year, dividing this number by the total enrollment in October of this year and then multiplying by 100.

⁷² Massachusetts Department of Education, Dropout Rates in Massachusetts Public Schools: 1999-2000, Annual Dropout Rates by District and Race/Ethnicity URL: http://www.doe.mass.edu/ata/dropout/9900/dre/dre_hn.html#L

These alarming figures show that the number of Latino dropouts (230) exceeded the sum of enrolled African American and White students (199). In November 2000, MassDOE released a District Performance Evaluation Report of LPS and reported that in 1999, nearly 20% of Lawrence High School Students dropped out.⁷³ The same report also found that one in three students missed 20% or more of the days they were enrolled which equates to at least one school day per week. The overall findings of this report found inconsistent standards of achievement for students, teachers, and administrators. For instance, the evaluation team found that the “district had not provided ESL, bilingual, and Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) with written guidance and suggestions on ways to modify teaching methods to support higher levels of academic attainment by the District's many English language learners.”⁷⁴ This points to the high dropout rate for Latino students in the district. The above figures affirm that LPS continues to be a poor performing district and needs to do a better job of serving its constituents. LPS needs to carefully assess the specific needs of its students. The community school effort is an excellent opportunity to do this.

Building upon the three case studies presented in the previous chapters will be an important first step in establishing the New Holy Rosary School as a community school. Although, as CAS states, each school has its own set of unique strengths, resources, and services it needs.⁷⁵ Therefore, it is important that we apply a similar framework

⁷³ Massachusetts Department of Education, District Performance Evaluation Report - November 2000. Lawrence Public Schools, Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations. URL: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ata/news01/208sumkey.html>

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ The Children's Aid Society. *Building A Community School*. Third Edition. [online book], September 2001; page 17. URL: http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/comm_school_form/

and philosophy to the New Holy Rosary School without utilizing a cookie-cutter approach.

Community School Partnerships

The first step in the development of the New Holy Rosary School as a community school is to create and approve a mission statement. This should be accomplished early in the community planning process through a democratic process by the leadership team responsible for planning and programming the school. A clear mission statement will help direct the community planning efforts and guide the creation of partnerships. Currently the planning process is informal and has yet to be recognized by LPS. The short time frame of the project requires LPS to legitimize the process and commit to creating a community school that is the result of this process.

Family Involvement

In order for the New Holy Rosary School to truly be a community school, relationships must be built between the school, the parents of the students, and the surrounding North Common community. Schools often make the mistake of leaving it up to the parents to organize themselves and become involved in their child's school and education. Yet, a true partnership would be the result of the school taking the initiative to involve parents.⁷⁶ LPS can use LCW's experience to organize the parents in the North Common neighborhood. These residents may already trust LCW and would be more willing to become involved in the community school if they saw that it was a

collaboration between LCW and LPS. If the school makes parents feel welcome, then parents will feel like they have a voice in their child's education. As a result, parents may participate more in programs at the school and recognize that their child's learning occurs in at least two places: at school and at home. Caplan then discuss how this partnership affects the students by letting them see the connection between what they learn in the classroom and the real world. In my experience with the youth from Paterson, New Jersey and Lawrence, Massachusetts, this moment of realization is key in instilling community pride and forging civic responsibility into the minds of these young adults. Often times students complain that what they learn in the classroom is not applicable to real life. But, a strong partnership between the school and the home can help students see how they fit into multiple communities including the community of their school, their family, the city in which they live, and at times the world at large.

As mentioned above, schools should initiate these important partnerships. Caplan describes how school-family-community partnerships can be initiated and maintained through action teams. Action teams may consist of parents, teachers, administrators, staff, community members, etc. The National Network of Partnership Schools suggests action teams consist of the following⁷⁷:

- two or three teachers from different grade levels
- two or three parents with children in different grade levels and/or a representative of parents
- one administrator

⁷⁶ Caplan, Judith G. *Critical Issue: Constructing School Partnerships with Families and Community Groups*. [online article] North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998. Page 1. URL: <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa400.htm>

⁷⁷ National Network of Partnership Schools: Action Teams, <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/action.htm>

- one member from the community at large (in the case of the Holy Rosary School in Lawrence, this position could be filled by an alumnus of the Holy Rosary School. This will help by involving a more senior member of the community in the new Holy Rosary School
- two students from different grade levels
- other people central to the school's work including: cafeteria worker, school social worker, guidance counselor, or nurse. Since the Holy Rosary School is located in the North Common neighborhood and LCW's service area is also in this neighborhood, then perhaps a representative from LCW could be part of the action team. It would be additionally beneficial if this person also lived in the North Common neighborhood.

Once this partnership has been established, the parents and community members must feel like valuable members of the team. Caplan describes one method where parents and community members introduce the neighborhood to the teachers by taking them on walking tours to help them understand the lives of their students outside the classroom.⁷⁸ In my experience working with youth in urban schools, a common complaint is that teachers do not engage themselves with the community surrounding their school. Many teachers do not live in these communities and tend to drive into the school parking lot in the morning and drive out in the evening thus having little interaction with the community. Such tours would help bridge this gap.

Other activities that can strengthen the partnership include having parents commit to helping children at home, volunteering in the classroom, participating in decision-making

⁷⁸ Caplan, Judith G. *Critical Issue: Constructing School Partnerships with Families and Community Groups*. [online article] North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998. Page 3. URL: <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa400.htm>

bodies at the school, and promoting school bond issues in the community.⁷⁹ Since each school community is different, it is important for the action team to first perform research to assess the specific needs of the community. These can take the form of questionnaires, focus groups, or regular meetings that garner community input. In the North Common neighborhood and Lawrence as a whole, it will be important for the action team to develop bilingual literature and conduct their meetings in English and Spanish so that parents feel welcome and included in the team. Once again, LPS can benefit from the extensive groundwork, data, and trust that LCW has accumulated over the years working with the North Common.

Community Involvement

Forming partnerships with community institutions will be as important as forging family partnerships in the New Holy Rosary School. The City of Lawrence has a broad range of community, civic, cultural, business, and religious organizations that have the potential to play a role in the New Holy Rosary School as well as other public schools. The following is a list of organizations that could be part of this partnership with the new elementary school:

Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW)

LCW is a non-profit community development corporation whose principal service area is the North Common neighborhood. Their mission and commitment to the North Common neighborhood make them essential partners in the formation and sustainability of the New Holy Rosary School. In addition to their award-winning community

⁷⁹ Ibid, page 4.

development work, they also have a strong commitment to the economic development of their constituents through programs in family asset building. This includes programs for first-time homebuyers, Individual Development Accounts for both adults and youth as well as after school programs for Lawrence youth in diverse areas such as architecture, finance, fashion design, dance, and web design. The youth in these programs are in high school and they could serve as mentors to the New Holy Rosary School children. In addition, LCW could extend its youth programs to include younger children and even house some of the after school programs as described below. The North Common neighborhood is the main service area of LCW. The following is a list of some of the projects currently underway in the neighborhood. Their proximity to the New Holy Rosary School create potential linkages.

Our House / Nuestra Casa – This project plans to build a family learning center at the northern gateway to the North Common neighborhood. LPS could partner with LCW in providing after-school programs at this site as well as support services to the parents of the New Holy Rosary School students.

Brook St. Park – After a community design process by LCW and Groundwork Lawrence, a former brownfield site along the Spicket River in the North Common neighborhood is currently being redeveloped into a public park. Since the existing Holy Rosary School does not include a very large playground, a partnership could be established with the park to use it as a play area. In

exchange the school could provide maintenance by the students to teach them landscaping and recycling skills as well as organizational skills.

Fleet Bank

In 2000 FleetBoston Financial Foundation announced the Fleet Community Renaissance Initiative. LCW is one of six recipients included in this program of community revitalization. Although this money has already been allocated to support the above programs, LCW and LPS should pursue a strong relationship with Fleet. In addition, the FleetBoston Financial Foundation funds programs in public education, youth development, and economic opportunity.⁸⁰ The New Holy Rosary School could greatly benefit from these funding sources.

Lawrence General Hospital

Located at the southern corner of the North Common neighborhood, Lawrence General is the largest employer in Lawrence. If health services are included in the New Holy Rosary School, the hospital could provide staff and establish a stronger connection with its surrounding community.

Northern Essex Community College (NECC)

NECC has two campuses in Lawrence and offers associate degree and adult education programs. With concentrations in early childhood education, healthcare practice, computing, childcare, graphic design, and liberal arts,⁸¹ NECC could provide the New

⁸⁰ Fleet, About Fleet, Fleet in the Community, FleetBoston Financial Foundation
URL:http://www.fleet.com/about_inthecommunity_fleetbostonfinancialfoundation.asp#PE

⁸¹ Northern Essex Community College. URL: <http://www.necc.mass.edu>

Holy Rosary School with valuable interns to benefit the learning experience for the elementary and post-secondary students.

The Eagle Tribune

This newspaper is one of the oldest dailies in the Merrimack Valley with its origins being traced back to 1868.⁸² With its large circulation reaching over 60,000 the tribune could be an excellent way to promote programs or attract volunteers for the New Holy Rosary School.

*New Balance Athletic Shoe, Inc.*⁸³

New Balance is a 96 year-old Massachusetts based company specializing in athletic shoes and apparel for women, men, and children. Lawrence is home to its World Design Center which employs 616 associates in the Ayer Mill Building along the Merrimack River. In addition, New Balance has a strong commitment to its community especially in the cities where its offices or production facilities are located. It gives to the community in three ways: The New Balance Foundation provides charitable monetary support, the Corporate Contributions Program makes both promotional and charitable monetary contributions, and the Charitable Product Donation Program provides footwear and apparel to organizations that assist persons in need. As a partner in the New Holy Rosary School, New Balance could help provide shoes to students in need and develop an after-school sports program with the help of volunteers from its Lawrence facility. Currently, New Balance contributes money to the Merrimack

⁸² Eagle Tribune Website. URL: <http://www.eagletribune.com/framesets/comphistory.htm>

⁸³ New Balance Website. URL: <http://www.newbalance.com>

Valley Foundation to help maintain the Ayer Mill Clock Tower. They also contribute to the Lawrence Young Entrepreneur Alliance which helps develop business skills for adolescent boys.

Essex Art Center (EAC)

EAC is a non-profit organization dedicated to children and art located adjacent to LCW in the Mill District. Their mission is “to inspire and nurture the diverse artistic potential of the Greater Lawrence Community through classroom exploration and gallery exhibitions making the creation and enjoyment of art accessible to ALL.”⁸⁴ Located within walking distance from the New Holy Rosary School, the students can take advantage of the numerous after-school arts programs offered by EAC. In addition, if there is a shortage of art space at the New Holy Rosary School, they could make use of EAC’s facilities similar to the way MPACT uses the local YMCA.

Rotary Club

In Looking at Lawrence, Dresser describes how the Rotary Club adopted the Hennessy School for a read-aloud and science program.⁸⁵ Perhaps this can happen with the Holy Rosary alumni as an after school program that doubles as a child care program. In addition, the school district is committed to the literacy of its young adult population. This commitment could turn into financial resources to carry out such a program. This multi-generational interaction will give children a historical connection to the Holy Rosary school and the North Common neighborhood.

⁸⁴ Essex Art Center, About Us. URL: <http://www.essexartcenter.com/aboutus.html>

Malden Mills⁸⁶

The Malden Mills manufactures Polartec fleece clothing. They have a unique place in the history of Lawrence because it is one of the few companies that has avoided moving its production facilities overseas and has been committed to its local work force. The greatest example of this commitment came in 1995 when a fire destroyed the Lawrence plant. The owner, Aaron Feuerstein, immediately decided to rebuild the factory in the same place and pay his employees their wages during the rebuilding stage.

Unfortunately, the company recently filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy but is slowly trying to recover. The Malden Mills could provide support to the New Holy Rosary School through donations of clothing and a volunteer workforce.

The Greater Lawrence Community Action Council Inc.

GLCAC, Inc. is a private non-profit agency combating poverty in the Greater Lawrence area. The GLCAC, Inc sponsors many programs covering a multitude of areas including childcare, healthcare access, teen advocacy, family support services, and home energy assistance programs for low-income persons. Together with Lawrence Community Works, these two agencies can provide the New Holy Rosary School with a strong partnership with community organizations working to fight poverty through innovative programs.

⁸⁵ Dresser, Thomas. Looking at Lawrence. Action Press and KR Graphics, Lawrence and Andover, MA, April 1997, page 4.

⁸⁶ Polartec Home Page. URL: <http://www.polartec.com>

Holy Rosary Church Parish

Religious organizations can be effective partners because of the potential for large numbers of volunteers dedicated to strengthening communities. In the North Common neighborhood, this is enriched by the fact that many of the parishioners may also be alumni from the Holy Rosary School. These community members can help with after-school programs. They can also take advantage of the New Holy Rosary School and its amenities when the school is not using it at night and on the weekends.

Lawrence Police Department

Elected officials often feel an increase in the number of police officers in a neighborhood will contribute to its revitalization and safety. Yet, numbers alone will not help improve these areas. Police officers need to become engaged and active members of communities so that residents will trust them and work with them towards community revitalization. One method for building this trust is by increasing the number of police officers that reside in the neighborhood. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has a program called the Officer Next Door Program that aims to increase the number of local neighborhood police officers by giving them priority in purchasing HUD-designated affordable homes in low-income communities. Another method is by initiating youth programs in the neighborhood. In Paterson, New Jersey, the local police department organizes an after school and midnight basketball league for youth. This would be an excellent way for the Lawrence Police Department to build relationships with the North Common children. A partnership with New Balance Athletic Shoes could also provide support and equipment for this program.

Lawrence Office of Planning and Department (OPD)

Professor Strickland finds it absurd when he learns of the lack of communication between school districts and local planning or community development agencies. He feels it is imperative for the city planning department to meet with the board of education to create plans for the city.⁸⁷ Therefore, the Lawrence School Committee should take the opportunity presented by the New Holy Rosary School and invite the OPD to the community meetings. At the same time, the new planning director should meet with Superintendent Laboy to discuss a long-term strategy of community revitalization and the role of community schools.

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

HUD has two programs that can benefit the New Holy Rosary School and its partnerships.

Teacher Next Door Program – This program allows K-12 teachers or administrators to purchase HUD homes at 50 percent off of the list price in HUD-designated revitalization communities. The North Common neighborhood is identified as such by HUD. If a home is purchased with a FHA-insured mortgage, then the teacher only needs a \$100 down payment for the home. To qualify, teachers must purchase a home that is within their school district and they must live in it for at least 3 years.

⁸⁷ Professor Roy Strickland, Presentation at American Planning Association Conference, Chicago, Illinois, April 14, 2002.

Office of University Partnerships (OUP)

OUP is a department within HUD dedicated to establishing university partnerships with community groups and institutions. It has three main goals:

- To recognize, reward, and build upon successful examples of universities' activities in local revitalization projects;
- To create the next generation of urban scholars and encourage them to focus their work on housing and community development policy; and
- To create partnerships with other Federal Agencies to support innovative teaching, research, and service partnerships.

LPS and the New Holy Rosary School could use this program to fund a partnership with one of the many universities in the vicinity. A relationship similar to MPACT with MIT and now Michigan could develop.

Lawrence School Committee

A natural partner should be the School Committee representative responsible for District B.⁸⁸ This representative should be involved in the planning process from beginning to end and continue being an active member of the leadership structure created by the New Holy Rosary School.

The overall goal of forming partnerships between the school, families, and organizations is to make the school more accountable to the community. Caplan notes that the agenda of school reform advocates will be best realized with the support of the entire

⁸⁸ Currently, Pedro Arce is the District B representative but his term will soon end. It would be beneficial for Mr. Arce to be actively involved in the process so that he can mentor the new representative and allow for a fluid transition.

community including the parents, citizens, and businesses. In addition, active involvement from community leaders will provide the students with positive role models who can help students establish personal goals.

Funding

As is inherent in the name, a community school such as the one being proposed for the New Holy Rosary School will only be possible through the support of the community. Success has been possible in the three case studies due to a dedicated team of people committed to improving educational opportunities for all youth. At the same time, many of their efforts would not be possible without the financial support they have received.

A diverse set of services including health care, social welfare, after school programming, childcare, fitness, and leisure activities demands a diverse portfolio of funding streams. Besides obvious support from the US Department of Education, the Lawrence Public School District should embark on a strategy of creative fundraising and short and long-term support mechanisms to sustain the New Holy Rosary School. Foundations, private corporation funds, and banks should be solicited for larger grants. The Community Reinvestment Act makes banks an excellent target as a source of funds. Another source of support can be from programs such as Medicaid. Success in the New Holy Rosary School will result from a public, private, non-profit, and community partnership with a strong understanding and a commitment to the mission statement created by the school.