

Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis and George Washington Community High School: Educating Their Communities Together

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Abstract

Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis worked with the residents and leadership of three neighborhoods adjacent to the campus to reopen the closed George Washington High School. The resulting partnership has strengthened the civic engagement mission of the university, and contributed to an award-winning community-based school. The partnership most recently was recognized with a 2010 Outreach Scholarship/W. K. Kellogg Foundation Engagement Award for the North Central Region.

Introduction

The mission of Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) is “to advance the State of Indiana and the intellectual growth of its citizens to the highest levels nationally and internationally through research and creative activity, teaching and learning, and civic engagement” (<http://www.iupui.edu/about/core.html>). As a part of the campus’ civic engagement, the university is dedicated to community activities that help improve life in Indianapolis and Central Indiana. These activities are exemplified at George Washington Community High School, which likely would not exist without the partnership between the university and the neighborhoods that make up what was once called the Westside Cooperative Organization area. In this article, the partnership is referred to as the George Washington Community High School–Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis school-university partnership.

The Community Context

Only a river separates Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) from the Near Westside Indianapolis community. However, the bridges that connect the urban research campus of more than 30,000 students with its neighbors to the west are both real and symbolic (Bringle, Officer, Grim, & Hatcher, 2009). Relationships between the university and the Near Westside

have taken years to develop, yet their strength gives support for faculty and staff members, students, and community residents to cross back and forth between the campus and neighborhoods. The existence of the community high school is a significant achievement of the community-university partnership described in this article.

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The community-university partnership is the primary mechanism to address diminishing educational opportunities in the Westside Cooperative Organization neighborhoods. The U.S. Census Bureau reports

that only about 5% of adults aged 25 and older living in the neighborhoods who sent their children to the high school before it closed had attended college. Prior to 1995, George Washington High School had been the educational and civic heart of the Near Westside Indianapolis community. The school served residents of the mainly working-class area made up of three distinct neighborhoods, along with West Indianapolis to the south. Each of the neighborhoods had its own distinct culture. The high school and all elementary schools in the Westside Cooperative Organization area were closed by 1995 as the Indianapolis Public Schools District consolidated schools due to decreased enrollment.

The Community-University Partnership: The Early Years

In response to the school district’s closing of the public schools, IUPUI campus administration began conversations in 1996 with community leaders about the development of a long-term partnership between the campus and the Westside Cooperative Organization. In 1997, the university committed resources from the Chancellor’s Office to establish the Office of Neighborhood Partnerships. A U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Outreach Partnership Center grant in 1998 led to the formation of the Westside Education Task Force. Composed of university faculty and staff members, residents, community leaders, and staff members from neighborhood organizations, it had as its primary goal the reopening of George

Washington High School as a full-service community school that would serve the children and families of the Westside Cooperative Organization and West Indianapolis, the neighborhood area south of the school. The university worked with the Westside Education Task Force and Indianapolis Public Schools, and in the fall of 2000 the high school reopened as a middle school. Each year thereafter, a grade level was added. Today, the school houses grades 7–12 as a full-service community school. Since the opening of the community school, the Westside Education Task Force has met regularly to promote initiatives related to education (e.g., a new elementary school, health, parks, afterschool programs, charter schools, and adult education programs).

Over the years, the community-university partnership has expanded, enabling IUPUI to offer teacher education opportunities as well as community service activities and service-learning classes at the community high school. Scholarships and federal work-study funds provide financial aid for college students to work at the community high school, and a fitness center program for the community is staffed by university students. As a result, the community high school has been recognized nationally as a model for community-university partnerships, and replication of the model has begun at other Indianapolis community high and elementary schools.

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Evolution of the Community-University Partnership

Since the school’s reopening, there has been continuous growth in the reciprocal relationship between IUPUI, the community high school, and the Near Westside neighborhoods (*Bringle, Officer, et al., 2009*). The success of the partnership inspired school staff members to develop new ways to engage youths in the community (e.g., service-learning classes, service events, a community high school advisory council), and to engage the community in the high school (e.g., alumni association, community events at the school).

Since 2000, the university has also helped secure funding for community programs in financial literacy and health promotion. The achievements are communicated to the high school students' parents and neighborhood residents through school flyers, local community newspapers, and reports at community and Westside Education Task Force meetings.

The university's partnership with the community high school has contributed to the capacity of IUPUI to be an engaged campus. Since 2001, university students from service-learning classes have contributed to tutoring and mentoring at the school. College students also coach cheerleading, assist the school nurse, conduct fitness classes, conduct art classes, and serve as fitness trainers. In 2001–2002, IUPUI faculty members taught three service-learning courses in partnership with the community high school. This number has steadily increased, and in 2009–2010 at least 16 courses were offered in partnership with the school. In total, through spring 2010, 28 university faculty members have offered 21 courses through 12 departments, including Business, Communication Studies, Education, Nursing, Philanthropic Studies, Psychology, Political Science, Physical Education, Sociology, Geography, Science, and Spanish. Annually, about 85 university service-learning students are placed at the community high school. Other outcomes of the community-university partnership are described below.

Preservice Teacher Education

One successful initiative in the partnership, in terms of impact on IUPUI, has been the teacher education program implemented through the Indiana University School of Education, which primarily focuses on urban education. Five courses in the School of Education offer preservice teachers valuable hands-on, urban field experiences at the community high school. Six students who graduated from the IUPUI teacher education program now teach at the community high school and mentor IUPUI preservice teachers (*Medina, Morrone, & Anderson, 2005; Morrone, Medina, & Anderson, 2002*).

Exercise and Health Science

Another successful initiative in the community-university partnership is the Physically Active Residential Communities and Schools' program, Fit for Life, an interdisciplinary program jointly created by faculty members from Physical Education and Nursing. The program provides daily exercise and health education to

community high school students through the wellness center at the school. Program services are also available during evenings to students, parents, teachers, and other community members; there were 722 participants in 2010. The program provides 60 IUPUI undergraduate students each semester with service-learning experiences at the community high school. The program has been replicated at two other high schools in the city, providing an additional 25 university students per site with service-learning experiences.

University Student Involvement

Since 2001–2002, 366 IUPUI students have earned financial support for their college education by providing service, tutoring, homework assistance, and mentoring at the Near Westside Indianapolis community schools. The programs also support IUPUI student personal development, academic achievement, and civic commitment (*Hatcher, Bringle, Brown, & Fleischhacker, 2006*).

University Faculty Involvement

In 2008, the university created a new faculty development program that partners with the community high school and other Westside organizations. Each year, six university faculty members are selected to participate in the Faculty Community Fellows program. The participants spend the year developing civic engagement partnerships, activities, and service-learning opportunities in the Near Westside Indianapolis community. The program supports faculty fellows with teaching service-learning classes and community-based research. The goal is for the fellows to apply their expertise to the facilitation of meaningful community change in the neighborhoods. The Faculty Community Fellows work collaboratively with each other, their community partners, and Office of Neighborhood Partnerships staff members to design projects that demonstrate significant student learning and community impact, and create examples for faculty peers and community members.

Other Outcomes of the Community-University Partnership

The community-university partnership stimulated the formation of an IUPUI Talent Alliance to coordinate the university's work with other K-12 institutions in Indianapolis and central Indiana. The partnership has also prompted the university to become involved in national and global conversations on engaging universities in underresourced neighborhoods and schools. Additionally, the civic engagement work of IUPUI has led to a number of regional and national recognitions.

Measuring the Impact of the Community-University Partnership

Four studies have assessed the community-university partnership. Each of these studies is briefly presented in this section.

Study 1: Interviews

In 2001, interviews were conducted with 21 individuals from the community, the university, the city, and local businesses to assess the effectiveness of activities stemming from a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Outreach Partnership Center grant. These activities were related to organizational development, economic development, and education policy in building relationships between the university and the community.

Study 2: Survey

A second evaluation of the activities, outcomes, and partnership was conducted 5 years later, in 2006. Key community members were asked to identify other key community respondents (residents, organizational staff members, community leaders, elected officials) for a telephone survey. Seventeen community members completed the survey, which focused on the IUPUI partnership with their community. Respondents from the community included residents, community leaders, and representatives from community organizations.

Study 3: Doctoral Dissertation

An Indiana University doctoral dissertation examined student activities and services at the community high school, and corresponding academic achievement from 2008-2009 (*Houser, 2010*). The dissertation is part of a 5-year evaluation of the full-service community schools model by the Indiana University School of Education Center for Urban and Multicultural Education. The evaluation examines a variety of indicators, including gains in student attendance, honor roll status, standardized test scores, graduation, parent engagement, health promotion participation rates, and total numbers of individual student, family, and community members receiving services.

Study 4: Constituency Analysis

Most recently, the community-university partnership's five constituencies were examined (students, organizational staff

members in the community, faculty members, administrators, and residents; (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009; Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010). The constituencies were analyzed in terms of how they have developed qualities of a relationship that are desirable in civic engagement work, including closeness, equity, and integrity. They were also analyzed for their capacity to accomplish their respective goals, joint goals, and future collaborative activities as part of the partnership (Bringle, Officer, et al., 2009).

Findings

Study 1: Interviews and Study 2: Surveys

According to the community interviews and surveys, the Westside community had a positive view of the Community Outreach Partnership Center grant activities as a whole. The education policy and programming partnership was viewed as a success. Virtually all respondents viewed tutoring and the work of the Westside Education Task Force favorably. Most respondents saw the Westside Education Task Force's work to reopen the high school as a model of fruitful partnership between the community and university.

Study 3: Doctoral Dissertation

The Houser dissertation study found that community high school students who participated in support services—notably extended-day activities—showed higher academic achievement levels (measured by individual grade-point averages) than their peers who participated less often. The study also found that traditionally underserved students academically outperformed more traditionally served students, with Hispanic males showing the most participation and highest academic achievement and white males showing the least participation and lowest academic achievement.

Other Houser findings related to student activities and services at the community high school suggest that (a) rates of participation in community-sponsored programs were very high, indicating that efforts to encourage participation in school-based community programs are successful; (b) participation in school and community-sponsored programming correlated with academic achievement, even when race/ethnicity and gender were controlled for; and (c) participation in academic and youth development programs

predicted academic achievement, even when race/ethnicity and gender were controlled for.

Study 4: Constituency Analysis

For purposes of analyzing the nature of the partnership that developed between IUPUI and the community high school, we use the term *relationship* to refer to personal interactions between people and the term *partnership* to describe a particular subset of relationships characterized by three qualities: closeness, equity, and integrity (Bringle, Officer, et al., 2009). Evidence from the analysis suggests that prior to the community high school opening, the relationships between IUPUI, residents, and community organizations were in a developing stage, with evidence of increasing interactions, diverse interactions, and common purpose reflected in the importance of enhancing educational opportunities in the community through IUPUI's civic engagement in the Near Westside neighborhoods. Although all of the relationships might not have been symmetrical, they were appraised as beneficial and equitable. Furthermore, they were developing qualities of high integrity. Residents, staff members from community organizations (e.g., community centers, public school administration), and IUPUI representatives were working together in a concerted way to meet the challenge of the lack of public schools in the neighborhoods, forging a common vision of opening schools, and developing strategies for working toward solutions. Thus, there was clear evidence that they were working with one another and there was an integration of purpose. Furthermore, partnerships (not just relationships) were being established (Bringle, Officer, et al., 2009). A closer look at the scope of activities and engagement between IUPUI and the community high school revealed that the current relationships between various constituent groups, including the community high school, IUPUI, residents, and community organizations, were close, reciprocal partnerships that demonstrated integrity (Bringle, Officer, et al., 2009).

Conclusion

The benefits of the community-university partnership are demonstrated by

- the proportion of graduating seniors accepted into postsecondary education, which increased from 80% in the first graduating class of 76 students in 2006 to 100% of the 71 students graduating in 2009;

- student attendance at the high school, which increased from 88% for the 1,168 total students in 2006 to 94% for the 848 total students in 2009;
- student achievement on standardized tests, which improved so that in 2009 students achieved adequate yearly progress in all categories except special education math and special education language arts;
- the number of educational initiatives on which university faculty members and community high school teachers have worked together, including service-learning courses for both K-12 and university students;
- five of the community high school teachers having become principals at other schools;
- the community high school's being considered an exemplary community, receiving recognitions, and serving as a model for other schools locally and nationally;
- the university's now having an important resource that provides a site for educationally meaningful service by university faculty and staff members, and students; and
- university faculty members' having an opportunity to study the nature of the school and the nature of the community-university partnership, which has resulted in 24 presentations at professional conferences and six academic publications, almost all of which have had community partners as copresenters and coauthors.

The university has used scholarships to support student service at IUPUI, stipends to faculty members to support the development of civic engagement partnerships, and federal work-study funds to support tutoring by university students, in addition to the staff and resources provided through the Office of Neighborhood Partnerships. The joint work of partnership members has resulted in more than \$3 million in external funding to support various aspects of the partnership.

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In general, transformational partnerships reflect both parties' viewing of partnership interactions as fair. Transformational partnerships demonstrate growth in ways that are uniquely meaningful to the university and the high school (Bringle, Clayton, et al., 2009; Bringle, Officer, et al., 2009; Clayton et al., 2010). The analysis of the George Washington Community School's partnerships with not only Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, but also with community residents and more than 50 local organizations, indicates a level of transformational change for each.

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