



# EastSide Learning Center

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY 2009



Photo: Suschett Pederson/The News Journal

*“Every child will learn”*



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Head of School

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any questions.

*“When I arrived at EastSide Charter fresh from my job as a special educator in the Brandywine School District, I approached the School as a work in progress. I saw the potential of the students and set out to create an atmosphere where our then-80 students would see the benefits of hard work and dedication. While we’ve relocated to a building with nine times the space and with nearly 400 students, I still look forward not only to furthering our students’ life prospects, but also to having our Learning Center become a full service community school – a catalyst for change in the community.”*

— Will Robinson, Ed.D., President, EastSide Learning Center Foundation

## EASTSIDE CHARTER SCHOOL'S HISTORY

EastSide Charter School opened its doors in 1997 on North Thatcher Street in a small, former community center leased from the Wilmington Housing Authority. In early 2005, after a competitive selection process, the City of Wilmington awarded EastSide the nearby, recently-vacated Martin Luther King Elementary School, a 69,000 square foot building built in 1962. Relocation to the MLK School site occurred in time for the beginning of the September 2005 school year.

EastSide is the first charter school in the country to be founded in cooperation with a public housing authority, and located within its property; it is also the first elementary charter in Delaware. It is situated adjacent to the low income neighborhoods of East Lake and Riverside of northeast Wilmington. East Lake has undergone an economic redevelopment which brings hope to a community previously notorious for drugs, alcohol abuse, and violent crimes. There are pending plans for redevelopment of Riverside as well.

In the East Lake and Riverside neighborhoods, 88% of the families are headed by single parents and many are handicapped by incarceration of a parent or by drug and alcohol dependencies. Fewer than 50% of those age 25 and above have graduated from high school. Approximately 85% of EastSide's students qualify for federally-funded free or reduced cost meals while approximately 20% demonstrate clear evidence of social and emotional issues which are being treated by School counselors.

EastSide currently enrolls 395 students from preK through Grade 8. The School has been fully enrolled and has generally maintained a waiting list every year. With the addition of more classes in grades 4 and 6 for the 2009-2010 year, the School will expand to about 445 students.

EastSide Learning Center seeks, develops and manages programs that provide enriching educational, cultural and athletic opportunities for children and adults within the greater East Lake and Riverside neighborhoods of northeast Wilmington, Delaware. EastSide Charter School, the primary activity of the Learning Center, is striving to provide a quality education for children who are culturally, economically and socially at risk. A central goal of the School is to educate children in a safe, nurturing environment that enables every student to excel both academically and socially. To ensure success, EastSide is focusing on structure, consistency, and academically rigorous programming toward developing students' determination, a passion for learning, and an appreciation of personal skills and effort.



## EASTSIDE'S EVOLUTION INTO A FULL SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Since its opening in 1997, EastSide's Board of Directors has had the vision of creating a full service community school – a community learning center whose programming would influence the lives not only of the students who attend the School but also all others living in the greatly underserved neighboring areas of East Lake and Riverside.

The extensive facilities of the former MLK School, such as the gymnasium, auditorium/theatre, cafeteria and playing fields, enable EastSide to become a foundation of enrichment within the community. The Board has named the entire facility EastSide Learning Center, an important change that more accurately reflects the founders' original concept for the School. Some of the programs at EastSide that expand the vision from school to full service community school include the following:

- **Communities in Schools**, a national organization whose Delaware affiliate now has personnel at EastSide who coordinate the School's extensive mentoring program; work with the School's counselors to assist students and their families with social, parenting and psychological issues; and broker the services of other community social service organizations.
- An **After School program** until 6 pm (currently managed by the University of Delaware's Cooperative Extension, using the national 4H model) offers a snack, homework assistance, enrichment activities and dinner to the School's students.
- **EastSide's extensive mentoring program** brings more than 120 persons from Wilmington businesses and churches for once a week, 45 minute mentoring sessions with 30% of our students.
- An **academic after-school tutorial program** for students who are substantially behind grade level in their academic work, staffed by full-time EastSide faculty.
- Taking advantage of a \$500,000 "**Spaces for Sports**" grant from Barclays Bank and another \$100,000 from Yaverland Foundation, which renovated the School's 3.5 acre playing fields and recreation area in Fall 2008, EastSide expects Boys and Girls Clubs to greatly expand its use of these facilities beginning in Spring 2009 for athletic activities involving our students and other neighborhood kids. The plan is for the athletic fields and gym to be used year round.
- **EastSide's facilities** are regularly used by churches and other community organizations for meetings and athletic and other activities.

EastSide has other exciting ideas to more fully utilize the gymnasium, library, computer lab and auditorium; even classrooms for adult education classes are being evaluated. With the completion of renovations underwritten by gifts to the School's *Every Child Will Learn* campaign, the most feasible of these plans will become a reality.

## EASTSIDE'S ACADEMIC PROGRAM

EastSide intends to be a model for academic success based on consistency, safety, determination and strong leadership. The School's formula is designed to make an immediate impact on the lives of children who, given the economic and environmental conditions in which they live, have been struggling to succeed or sometimes even stay enrolled in a traditional school environment. Maintaining what it takes to educate successfully requires more time — more time in school and more time with each student. It is about thoughtful, creative and individual programming — even, as in EastSide's case — at the expense of government funding. Children at EastSide learn in small classes, typically 16-20 students. While the concentration is on the fundamentals of reading, writing, math, social studies and science, instruction is also provided in art, music, computers, library and physical education. The overall student/instructional staff ratio is a very low 10.4 to 1. Unfortunately, government funds are allocated according to number of students, not the needs of the students. Given this serious constraint, it is expensive for EastSide to maintain its small classes.

During EastSide's early years, when it was a quarter of its present size and serving only grades K-3, it had some academic success that was recognized at the State, and even national, level. However, as the School grew in size and added older grades, up to grade 8, its academic performance in its older grades did not maintain the record that had been established in some of the younger grades. The School serves a particularly needy population, 20% of which receive professional counseling, and this has had a negative impact on academic performance. In addition, it bears noting that the population that EastSide serves is highly mobile, with transient families. From the 2007-08 school year to the 2008-09 school year, 138 of the school's current 360 K-8 students are new to the School.

Roughly speaking, in Reading/English Language Arts, the School's grades 3-8 were stable in academic performance from 2003 to 2005, but from 2005 until the 2007-2008 year, the overall performance in those grades declined, coincident both with the move of the School to a larger facility and the increased number of students with learning or behavioral difficulties.

Beginning in 2007, decisive steps were taken to deal with the disappointing academic performance and with distracting behavioral issues. The School adopted new curricular programs in Reading/English Language Arts, Math, Social Studies and Science. In the 2008-09 year, a new after-school academic tutoring initiative has begun, aimed at students who are performing below grade level; additional staff has been hired; more testing and review of students

### THE SCHOOL IS COMMITTED TO IMPLEMENTING THE OPERATIONAL STRENGTHS THAT ENCOURAGE SUCCESS:

#### Consistent and Individual Teacher/Student/Family Relationships

- A dedicated, well credentialed staff
- A low student/teacher ratio
- Required parental attendance for regular teacher conferences
- Individualized in-school and at-home assignments
- Tutoring in school if needed
- Assigned mentors if needed

#### A Strong, Detailed Curriculum

- Foundational subjects such as reading, writing and math
- Creative and expository writing
- Computer technology training
- Cultural programs in the creative and performing arts
- Conflict resolution programs that advocate problem prevention strategies

#### A Comprehensive Academic Program

- 11- month extended school year
- Full-day Kindergarten and Pre-K
- Structured after-school program to 6 pm
- Nutritious meals served at school, including universal free breakfast
- Mandatory uniforms



with behavioral and/or learning difficulties has been performed; and a series of structured protocols and interventions designed to help the classroom teacher, the student, and the student's parent or guardian address each such student's problem areas have been adopted.

Due to the nascent stage of these significant changes, it will take some time to completely reverse our academic declines and realize higher levels of proficiency across all grades. Nevertheless there are some signs of positive turnarounds. In 2007-08 there was a small increase for the first time in three years in the School's Reading/English Language Arts performance and in Mathematics, a declining trajectory was reversed, with substantial gains being made. Moreover the academic performance in the preK to 2nd grades continues to be good. With these initiatives plus considerable attention to the

structure of the day, the creation of additional small groups of instruction, and more focus on developing the capabilities of the faculty, the School is poised to reap additional gains in the coming years.

The School's administration is led by the highly experienced professionals of Renaissance School Services, including Dominique Taylor as Head of School, with active oversight by a strong Board of Directors. Renaissance has been responsible for financial and other non-academic operations of EastSide since February 2007. In September 2008 Ms. Taylor became the School's Achievement Specialist with major responsibility for the academic program and she became Head of School in November 2008. She has worked in schools for eighteen years. She is a former classroom teacher, reading specialist, assistant principal, achievement vice president, and director of operations at schools in Miami, Baltimore, Chester (Pa), and Charleston (SC).

Ms. Taylor and Rich O'Neill, Renaissance's president, have been working together in schools such as EastSide for four years. Between them, they have been involved in transforming some 25 schools around the country. Prior to the formation of Renaissance, both Ms. Taylor and Mr. O'Neill worked for a number of years with one of the country's largest school management organizations. In that capacity Mr. O'Neill was responsible for management of schools in Georgia, Ohio, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Maryland and New York. Ms. Taylor was recruited to one of Mr. O'Neill's sites in Baltimore, the Montebello School, where she served as assistant principal when it was recognized as a Maryland Blue Ribbon School of Excellence.

In addition, Mr. O'Neill is a member of the Board of Mass Insight Education and Research Institute in Boston, MA, which has been awarded one of the first National Math and Science Initiative grants of up to \$13.2 million for Advance Placement teacher training and increased involvement in AP course work and which is also widely considered one of the country's leading authorities in the turnaround of underperforming schools.



## EVERY CHILD WILL LEARN CAMPAIGN

Although EastSide was fortunate to be selected as the “recipient” of the former Martin Luther King School building, the Board was cognizant that relocation to a facility nine times the size of the WHA site would present enormous challenges in terms of costs related to facilities, teaching and learning tools, and programming.

Through the Fall of 2005, the Board made long-term strategic decisions that would eventuate in a full service community school for the East Lake and Riverside communities. From these intensive planning sessions emanated consensus that for the learning center to become a reality, a comprehensive campaign to raise funds for facilities, furniture and equipment, and summer, after-school and other programs, would be required. Thus began the Every Child Will Learn Campaign. At this time the Board also organized the separate EastSide Learning Center Foundation for the purpose of fund raising for EastSide and also to manage the third party users of EastSide’s facilities.

Since that time approximately \$3.4 million (including investment earnings) has been raised for the Campaign, plus another \$1.1 million in annual operating grants and annual fund contributions. Our contributors reflect wide public support: 20 foundations, 24 businesses, all Board members and more than 350 other individuals. Thus far we have applied these funds (and significant in-kind contributions) to the following highest priority facilities and educational projects:



### FACILITIES RENOVATIONS FUNDED BY CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS:

\$700,000
# Replace 40 year old roof
275,000
Renovate, equip and staff new library
100,000
Renovate and equip new computer lab
400,000
Upgrade basic electrical systems
60,000
External and internal security systems
35,000
Renovate teachers’ lounge
355,000
Air condition cafeteria/multi-purpose room and miscellaneous improvements
74,000
Science Program and Equipment
680,000
*Spaces for Sports renovations of athletic fields and playground areas
540,000
*Renovate gym, locker rooms and auditorium
= \$3,219,000

# A new roof was not on our original list of priority projects but as the renovation work began, our contractors informed us that the roof needed to be replaced immediately.

\* The athletic and recreational facilities also were not on our original priority list but we were happy to receive very generous grants which were targeted for these facilities and the resulting improvements certainly are great enhancements to our facilities.



### **Ongoing Operating Needs; Supporting Unfunded Educational Programs:**

EastSide's ability to create dedicated learners depends on a highly structured 11-month academic program with small classes during school hours, an equally strong academic-based after-school program, and other special programs and services. Following is a list of the programs and services that depend largely on private gifts and grants to meet their annual cost:

#### **PreK Program - \$225,000**

This has been one of our most important and most successful programs. In the early years of the School's history, the leadership realized that many kids were arriving for kindergarten not ready to learn. Therefore, we started a preK program for 3-4 year olds to address this problem. Since then we have noted a significant improvement in the skills of our kindergarten students who started with us in preK. We now provide full day preK for 40 students. Delaware's public school system does not provide any funding for preK.

#### **Universal Free Breakfast - \$10,000**

Great educational programs are not effective if students are unable to concentrate. Kids need to have a nourishing breakfast in order to be ready to learn. Many of our students were coming to school without such sustenance so we started providing a free nutritious breakfast to all in 2008 and that has had a very positive effect on students' ability to stay on task in the morning classes.

#### **Academic Tutorial Program - \$26,000**

The 70 lowest-performing students in the school have been identified for an extra hour of academic instruction in small groups two days a week. EastSide's full-time faculty provide the tutorial assistance and earn a stipend for the additional work. Gifts to this program will fund the teacher stipends and will allow the School to expand the program to more students on more days

#### **After-School Program - \$125,000**

Over 70 children attend an After-School program at EastSide until 6 p.m. every school day. The program includes the provision of snack and a dinner, assists children with their homework, and provides all the school's enrichment activities, including clubs and intramural athletics. The program is staffed by student interns, paraprofessionals, outside experts, and some full-time faculty. Contributions will help to expand the number of students we can serve and will provide additional extra-curricular programming.

### **Summer Program – \$25,000**

A 5 week Summer Session from mid-June to the end of July is a regular part of the EastSide school year. Children’s skills from the traditional school year are reinforced and enhanced with programming that includes reading, writing, science, computer skills, history and geography. We anticipate that, beginning in the summer of 2009, the academic program will be limited to the mornings and the afternoons will be devoted to sports and other enrichment activities. During the Summer Session, each student will go on three day-long field trips. Most of the sites, such as the Franklin Institute and the Camden Aquarium, are related to the particular lessons taught in the morning session.

Academic classes are taught by year-round faculty. Based on discussions we have had with Boys and Girls Clubs, we anticipate that organization will manage the afternoon programming. Costs for this program include salaries, transportation and admission fees to 3 sites per child per summer.

### **Mentoring/Communities in Schools - \$50,000**

Communities in Schools is a national organization which works with schools to facilitate connections with needed community resources to help students learn, stay in school, and prepare for life. EastSide has a partnership with the Delaware affiliate of CIS pursuant to which CIS provides two associates on-site who coordinate our mentoring program and maintain a case management and services program for students identified by EastSide as needing social and behavioral counseling dealing with anger management, conflict resolution, decision making, personal ethics, organizational management and goal setting.

### **Fundraising and Foundation Operations - \$75,000**

The Foundation operates with a lean staff of one who manages the publication of quarterly School newsletters and other external communications, public relations, the annual fund solicitation and facilities renovation projects, and the coordination of third party users of the facilities.

### **Funding a Professional Development Director - \$100,000**

For the last year, EastSide’s major fundraising has largely been conducted by volunteer Board members. In order to be successful in raising the funds that are needed to achieve our goals, it will be necessary to hire a full time professional development director. It is anticipated that, after the first year, such a development director would pay for him/herself.

## **PROGRAMS AND OPERATIONS FUNDED BY CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS:**

\$400,000 |

Support preK Program

125,000 |

Achievement Specialist

100,000 |

Support After School Program

60,000 |

Communities and Schools Contract

40,000 |

Support Summer Program and Field Trips

7,500 |

Universal Free Breakfast

150,000 |

Subsidize School operations

370,000 |

Fundraising and Foundation Operations

= \$1,282,500





#### **Saturday School – \$39,000**

EastSide would like to offer a program to students for academic work on Saturday mornings using a combination of EastSide faculty, other professionals, high school students, and retired educators. This program has been envisioned, but has not yet been offered, due to lack of funds. Contributions will allow the School to launch this program in the fall of 2009.

#### **Teacher Pay Equity – \$200,000**

Because EastSide offers so many additional programs and has small classes and also has a population that is in more need than that of many other schools, we stretch our budget to do as many things as possible. As a result, we pay our teachers less than neighboring school districts, while at the same time we ask them to teach a longer day and a longer year. An additional \$200,000 per year would allow the School to pay teachers at the same rates as our neighboring school districts, even though they would continue to teach a longer day and year than their neighboring peers.

#### **Total Annual Operating Needs - \$875,000**

With an expected 2009-2010 enrollment of 445 students, \$875,000 of philanthropic support would represent slightly less than \$2,000 per student. According to the Survey and Analysis of SMO-Managed Networks of Schools, published in November 2008 by Renaissance School Services, the average operating philanthropy per pupil in FY08 among Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) was \$2200. That research reflects the operating financials of six CMOs and four Education Management Organizations (EMOs) representing 71,000 students and 161 schools nationwide.

## **CAPITAL NEEDS: CONTINUING THE RENOVATING AND UPDATING OF AN AGING PHYSICAL PLANT**

Although the EastSide facility “presents well” from the street, the 47 year-old building requires significant additional renovations, including replacing the boilers, extending a new HVAC system throughout the building and replacing old, leaky window systems. Enormous cost inefficiencies such as drafty windows and exorbitantly expensive electrical and lighting systems plague annual operating costs. In addition, if the School is to operate as a community learning center successfully throughout the year, the new HVAC system must be extended throughout the building . Relying on the contractor expertise on our Board we have determined the following remaining costs for critical renovations in order of priority:

- Replace failing boilers - \$265,000
- Additional walk-in freezer and walk-in refrigerator - \$30,000
- Extend air conditioning to entire building; replace fire alarm system; renovate classrooms and classroom bathrooms; improve hallways – walls and flooring - \$3,400,000
- Replace exterior window systems - \$800,000
- Renovate hall and other bathrooms and make ADA improvements - \$700,000
- Landscaping - \$25,000
- Elevator - \$165,000

**Total Remaining Capital Needs - \$5,345,000**



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## EASTSIDE'S FUTURE

For eleven years, the dedicated faculty, administrators and volunteers of EastSide Learning Center have challenged children from some of Wilmington's most troubled neighborhoods to aspire to learn, to work resolutely, and to achieve and appreciate success. With academic and social support, these children are succeeding against difficult odds.

The positive reputation that EastSide has earned in the community has inspired the organization's leaders to first secure, then to utilize the financial resources required to become a true center for learning within the neighboring communities. Securing those resources requires the generosity and commitment of foundation and corporate leaders and hundreds of individuals who understand and believe that education is the key to arresting a downward spiral of poverty. The foundation of a high quality early education is a gift to which too many children have too little access. EastSide is emblematic of innovation and change. With generous community support, this one passionate organization with passionate leadership will be able to continue using education to make a significant, and permanent, impact on the lives of many children, their families, and their neighborhoods.

## CONTRIBUTION INFORMATION; DELAWARE STATE INCOME TAX CREDIT PROGRAM

Contributions to EastSide should be made payable to "EastSide Learning Center Foundation" and mailed to 3000 N. Claymont Street, Wilmington, DE 19802. Contributions of at least \$5,000 by individuals and \$10,000 by corporations may be eligible for a 50% Delaware state income tax credit under the Neighborhood Assistance Act Tax Credit Program. For information on this tax credit program or with respect to contributing marketable securities, please contact Charles McDowell at (302) 984 6012 or [cmcdowell@potteranderson.com](mailto:cmcdowell@potteranderson.com). EastSide Learning Center Foundation is a qualified 501(c)(3) tax exempt public charity under federal income tax laws.