



George Washington Community High School (GWCHS) Indianapolis, Indiana

Background

It's hard to imagine that Washington High was once an academically failing school that was closed by the Indianapolis Public Schools District. Today, the renamed George Washington Community High School (GWCHS) is alive with activity and its students are thriving.

The transition didn't happen overnight—and it wouldn't have happened at all if it weren't for the powerful commitment and intensity of support from the community. Neighborhood residents envisioned a center where the community collectively focuses on improving graduation rates and preparing young people for post-secondary education.

The neighborhood surrounding the school has a history of low educational attainment. According to School/Community Director Jim Grim, "Our community-wide goal since reopening the school has been to reverse that trend."

Programs & Services: Meeting Academic, Health, and Social Needs

Grim, whose salary is provided by the school's lead partner, the Mary Rigg Neighborhood Center, works with more than 50 local organizations to ensure that student and community needs are met on site. And this year, according to Principal Keith Burke, the partners received the largest Federal Full-Service Community School grant—\$2.4 million out of a total \$4.9 million distributed across the country.

Services at GWCHS include tutoring, mentoring, college and career preparedness, health, mental health, community service, fitness, GED, English-as-a-Second Language, cultural enrichment, parent engagement, and violence-prevention. The school is open to students and their families until 7 p.m. after school, weekends, and summers. Partner representatives meet monthly with school officials, students, and parents, to collaborate and align efforts with academic achievement goals.

Their partner, the Eli Lilly Corporation, provides critical support through tutoring and mentoring, a science labs program, and funding for community health education as well as nurse practitioners at the school's Teen Health Clinic. Counseling and case management services are provided for students and their families by Midtown Community Mental Health. These direct services allow the faculty and staff to give more energy to teaching and learning.

Partnerships: Focus on College and Career Preparation

The Learning Communities Initiative at GWCHS serves as the primary framework to prepare students for post-secondary success. The heart of such efforts focuses on exposing all 783 GWCHS students—as well as 216 students in grades 5 through 8 at the feeder elementary schools—to USA Funds' *Unlock the Future* and Scholarship America's *Scholarship* curricula.

School Stats

GWCHS serves approximately 783 students in grades 7-12:

- 31% are Hispanic, 24% are African-American, 41% are White, and 4% are Multiracial.
- 91% of students qualify for free or reduced-lunch.

The neighborhoods surrounding GWCHS have the fastest growing Hispanic population across Indianapolis.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 43% of adults age 25 and older living in Washington's target area have earned a high school diploma and about 5% have attended college.



Students participate in the Science Labs Program, sponsored by the Lilly Technology Center.

Service scholars from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) are trained to implement this college-prep curricula, which exposes youth to their individual talents and skills, related potential occupations, and relevant post-secondary education opportunities. Scholars also work with the 150 students who are in GWCHS's AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) classes and after school, to provide additional mentoring experiences and individualized tutoring. Principal Burke has proposed expanding AVID principles such as Cornell note-taking, basic study skills, and Socratic seminar school-wide next year. Washington's teachers routinely stay after school and provide extra resources. As Grim says, "Our teachers understand and support the notion of a school supporting a community and a community supporting a school."

"The goal is to blanket our entire community with consistent high school graduation and college-going messages to provide parents and youth with relevant, engaging information and tools for success, increasingly important in our global economy," Grim added.

Community partner, LaPlaza, sponsors a program called Tu Futuro for GWCHS's Hispanic high school students, a mother/daughter program for Hispanic middle school girls, and a new father/son component. These programs focus on culturally relevant academic support, graduation, and post-secondary education goals.

Additional programs at GWCHS feature career exploration. The ACE Mentoring Program—sponsored by local architecture and construction companies—exposes youth to construction management, architecture, and engineering careers. The Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce has also placed a full-time graduation coach at GWCHS who mentors 40 students identified as most at-risk, guiding them in strategies to address individual barriers to learning and providing them a personal vision for high school graduation and post-secondary education.

Leadership

When GWCHS received the Federal Full-Service Community School grant in 2008, IPS Superintendent Dr. Eugene White thanked the Mary Rigg Center and other community partners for recognizing that it takes "the entire village" to help students be successful. "The challenges our families face, particularly in urban schools, require addressing basic needs and supports so that our youth are better able to learn, thrive, and succeed in the ever-changing landscape we are faced with in public education and society today," he said.

Principal Burke points to the school's college-bound graduates as evidence of success: 91% of GWCHS's 2008 graduates pursued post-secondary education, as compared to 88% of 2007 graduates and 80% the previous year. In 2006, the school's first graduating class had the district's highest rate with 60% graduating. But under the state's new graduation formula, it dropped to 43% in 2007 and was 49% in 2008, he explained. "We know if we can get them to graduate, we can get them to college. That is our challenge as a community and together we will overcome [barriers to graduation]."

Results

GWCHS and their partners have focused on raising the attendance rate. Over the last two years, attendance has raised 8%, reaching 96% at one point in 2008-09 and exceeding the district goal of 95%. Two years ago, GWCHS students met Adequate Yearly Progress in only two categories, but this year, students achieved AYP in all but two categories. Graduation rates are among the highest in the district. For 2009, 100 percent of GWCHS's graduates have been accepted into a post-secondary institution. For several years, GWCHS's Dollars for Scholars Board has organized fundraising activities to raise student scholarship funds. For 2009 graduates, funds total over \$62,000.

The Coalition for Community Schools, housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership, is an alliance of national, state and local organizations in education K-16, youth development, community planning and development, family support, health and human services, government and philanthropy as well as national, state and local community school networks. The Coalition advocates for community schools as a strategy to leverage of local resources and programs, changing the look and feel of the traditional school structure to best meet the needs of children and families in the 21st century.

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