Five Selected Schools: A Brief Summary

Readers are directed to the detailed reports on each school that provide extensive demographic and achievement data found in Sections H-L.

Bruce Guadalupe

Bruce Guadalupe Charter School is associated with the United Community Center that holds the charter for the school. This school traces its history to a church related institution dating back to the 1930s. The primary focus of the school was to serve the Spanish speaking community in Milwaukee and previously had received funding as a voucher school and was associated as a charter school with the Milwaukee Public School System. In 2005 the United Community Center sought and received a charter from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). It serves a population of almost 100% Hispanic students and is a 4K-8 school.

Milwaukee College Preparatory School

Milwaukee College Preparatory School (MCP) was founded in 1996 as a private voucher school supported by a family committed to making a difference for central city students. The school began as a Marva Collins school employing the methods and curriculum developed by Collins in Chicago in the 1980s. After 6 years of operation the school applied for and received a charter beginning in 2002.

The school serves approximately 500+/- students, 99.9% of whom are Black and significant majority of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. This school has been recognized on five separate occasions by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction as a school that “beats the odds” in serving children within the Title I programs guidelines.

Seeds of Health Elementary

Seeds of Health Elementary is located on Milwaukee’s near south side and serves a population of primarily Hispanic students (90+%). This school is part of an organization called Seeds of Health, Inc. that operates both educational and health related services programs in Milwaukee. Free and reduced lunch is offered to over 90% of the students based on financial information. This is a 4K-8 school and is located in a former parochial school building. This school began in 1993 as a Milwaukee Public School’s contract school to provide education services. The UWM charter was granted in 2004 and currently serves 430 students at two locations.

Woodlands School

Woodlands began it career as the campus school form Alverno College located in Milwaukee Wisconsin. In the 1989 Woodlands separated from Alverno and became a private independent school that charged tuition and accepted vouchers where student family income qualified for a voucher. In 2003 Woodlands was granted a charter and allowed by changes in state law to retain students who were enrolled but lived outside of the city of Milwaukee. State law limited UWM charter schools to the city only. While the city only geographic limitation has been removed; enrollment at the school remains different than the four schools above with larger numbers of White students with

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minority students representing less than 50% of the student body and eligibility for free and reduced lunch is only 30-40% of the student body. The entire school is structured on a multi-grade approach.

Young Leaders Academy

Young Leaders Academy (YLA) was developed by the Metropolitan Milwaukee YMCA as an outgrowth of an after school and summer program to serve central city youth. The charter was granted in 2002 and serves approximately 520 students in Milwaukee’s near north side. It is the only school in this study that did not exist as a school prior to receiving a charter from UWM. This school is almost 100% minority. It is located in a new facility built in 2002 and also houses a neighborhood YMCA program.

General Observations of the Five Schools

This research project identified a number of common elements as well as differences that helped describe these schools. It was apparent that while there are similar characteristics that contribute to the success of a school there is also evidence that suggests that differences are not necessarily a barrier to success. A common barrier that is found in much of the existing research literature is economic disadvantage, however in this study it was not a barrier. A common element that is considered essential for achievement is attendance and in this study attendance is high.

Below are some general observations that the authors have identified as important to understand the general characteristics of these schools. Individual reports that follow this section will further illuminate these schools both similarities and differences.

1. Four of the five schools existed prior to becoming charters. Two schools, Woodlands and Bruce Guadalupe had a history of more than 50 years. Seeds of Health Elementary started as a contract school with MPS and Milwaukee College Prep was a voucher school for five years before becoming a charter and only Young Leaders Academy began as a new school.

2. Size of the school did not seem to influence results; Bruce Guadalupe has an enrollment of almost 1000 students in two buildings and Woodlands with the lowest enrollment of 330 students and the others enrolling 400 - 500 students. Size did not seem to matter. This observation could also be applied to class size with most schools having approximately 24 students per class.

3. Three of the schools have a sponsoring organization:
   a. Bruce Guadalupe is part of the United Community Center, A Hispanic community organization, Seed of Health Elementary, Seeds of Health, Inc. and Young Leaders Academy, YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee.
   b. Milwaukee College Preparatory and Woodlands do not have a sponsoring organization.

4. Minority membership did not affect the general achievement outcomes:
a. Bruce Guadalupe and Seeds of Health Elementary are almost 100% Hispanic
b. Milwaukee College Preparatory and Young Leaders Academy are 100% African American
c. Woodlands is approximately 50% white, 30% Black and 20% Hispanic.

5. Economically Disadvantaged, as defined by Free and Reduced Lunch was different across the schools, Seeds of Health Elementary and Young Leaders Academy were almost 100% disadvantaged, Bruce Guadalupe and Milwaukee College Preparatory around 75% and Woodlands at 16% economically disadvantaged.

6. School year is longer than traditional 180-day year, generally 5-10 days longer.

7. Leadership has been stable for at least 10 years at four of the five schools. Leadership styles and focus on the culture of the school varied from school to school, but leadership attention to promoting the mission was evident and purposeful at all the schools.

8. All five schools are dependent upon parent transportation as public transportation (yellow buses) is not provided to these schools under legal interpretation.

9. Attendance is high, generally 95% or better.

10. Student mobility at these schools is generally low, less than 10% excluding graduates.

11. Classroom observations suggested that student engagement/ on-task behavior was very good.

12. Staff mobility is generally low, with teacher departure associated with spousal job change or being asked not to return.

13. School uniforms are required at three schools, Bruce Guadalupe, Milwaukee College Prep and Young Leaders Academy, while Seeds of Health Elementary and Woodlands do not.

14. Age of facilities varied, Woodlands being in a building that was over 50 years old with student bathrooms located in the basement, Bruce Guadalupe and Young Leaders Academy are modern buildings.

Research team members drafted individual school reports (see Sections H-L ) based on observations and interviews that described the significant aspects of the school’s culture that seemed to define the school and its basis for successful achievement meeting the challenges of urban education. In team discussions some general findings were suggested in the analysis of each school and what might be evident in more than one school. These observations statements were considered to have been repeated more than a few times and represent some general findings.

1. Curriculum did not seem to be the dominant factor in the operations of the school. Curricular content was important, but strategies to organize and deliver content seemed to carry more weight.

2. Acceptance of mission and understanding of mission was very evident in interviews. Mission also guided staff in problem solving at the teacher level when student educational challenges became evident.
3 Teaching and developing social skills, pro-social behaviors and promoting character were dominant themes that created a school culture.

4 Each school had a definable structure that shaped the culture. Structural elements such as obvious routines, clear expectations (social and academic), group identity, social responsibility, defined patterns of movement, rituals intended to reinforce the mission and an environment that was supportive of students needs to understand expectations.

5 Leadership was a dominate element in interviews, leadership facilitated both faculty and students opportunity to participate.

6 Frequently teachers would report, “I can teach at this school”. The meaning of this phrase supported the observation that student behavior was such that teachers could conduct their lesson with good cooperation from students and the student performance was such that teacher could readily identify student success and outcomes. Little time needed to be spent on management of behavior.

7 Teachers and leadership both participated in the hiring process and selecting individuals who could contribute to the existing culture was of prime importance.

8 Instructional style may be more important than the actual curriculum.

9 Students knew that teachers cared about them.

10 Parent cooperation was reported as positive and there were few if any complaints regarding lack of parent support with some schools reporting 100% attendance at parent teacher conferences.

In identifying the factors that contribute to the success of these schools one is drawn to the general concepts of the effective school literature and the seven correlates of successful schools literature (Lizotte, 2009) and the myriad of studies that shape that body of literature. There is no question that the elements of the Seven Correlates are evident in these schools, some more obvious than others and with emphasis placed on certain elements more than others. So how does the successful school achieve its outcomes?

To observers in this study there was no single leadership style other than the commitment to the mission, students and teachers. Some leaders are omni-present in their school, some leaders use soft signs to signify achievement and others have a structured process to insure that all the bases are covered. However in each instance the leaders and staff are committed to building a culture that promotes students of character, the future value of education, clear expectations for success and that learning/academic outcomes have significant future value.

Teachers, like leaders, accept the mission or are servants to the mission to insure that a classroom reflects the attitudes and culture that promotes student achievement. In defining a classroom culture of success, teachers are rewarded because they can “teach” and experience the fulfillment of having success with students. It’s a positive cycle that builds between teacher and student, respect and hard work satisfies that human need to become self-actualizing.
The glue in all of this is the commitment to the mission that has as a central theme that all children can learn, teachers can teach and are gratified by the outcomes. Leaders facilitate the nurturing of attitudes and an understood values based culture supports the teaching learning process. Repeating these achievement outcomes over the years demonstrates that the process can be repeated and sustained.