

## **Chapter 6**

### **Vision and Recommendations**

#### **School Vision**

The redevelopment of the Holy Rosary School is an excellent opportunity for LPS to be innovative and create a new method of school development in the city. In order for this school to be a broad-base leadership team comprised of the various constituents of the community, the leadership team could be built on a model similar to those mandated by the New York City Board of Education.

The beginning of this paper asked the reader to imagine life in a community school. Based on what we can learn from the stories in this paper we can begin imagining the New Holy Rosary School after it opens in the fall of 2003. A typical day may look like this:

In the morning a student would walk into the atrium of the school and be greeted by an abundance of natural light and options. The mission of the school would be embossed in the floor of this space, informing visitors that they have entered a special place. The ground floor would be like a commercial street in a town, full of services including a parent center, an eye doctor, and the student-run café and bookstore serving breakfasts. The community room would be adjacent to the administrative offices on the ground floor as well. This would be a room staffed by a person responsible for maintaining relationships with the community

partners. It would be a library of information including free phone and internet access, pamphlets for services, and referrals to local agencies sharing in the school's mission.

Upstairs would be classroom space demonstrating the latest in information technology and media. The hallways would be a showcase of student work demonstrating accomplishments inside and outside the brick walls of the school. The curriculum would be based on LPS and Massachusetts Board of Education requirements with an emphasis on team teaching, overlapping and interdisciplinary subjects, and hands-on practicums. These practicums would take place in the afternoons where students would begin applying their classroom learning to real world dilemmas including issues of social justice, the environment, community development, science, technology, or the arts. Physical education would take place at the nearby Lawrence Common or the new Brook Street Park.

At the end of the school day students would have the opportunity to be involved in various after-school programs. Programs in fashion design, architecture and planning, sports, art, dance, theater, community development, web and graphic design, computer science, reading, business, and music can be made available either at the school or with one of the many partner organizations involved in the school.

At night, the school can open its doors to programs in adult education including GED classes, computers, English classes, and job-related skill building. On weekends, the multimedia auditorium space and classroom space could host movie nights or video game competitions organized for the community and by the community.

On summer nights the Lawrence Police Department would host a youth athletic league giving youth a place to hang out with friends, get exercise, and develop leadership skills.

The list of potential activities seems limitless. The challenge for the New Holy Rosary School will be in finding financial and institutional support to maintain these partnerships. Naturally, partnerships may not be possible with all of the organizations named in the previous chapter, but an effort must be made to create a set of diverse partnerships that will support the school's mission.

### **Current Status and Recommendations**

The New Holy Rosary School is scheduled to open in 16 months. Currently, the community planning process initiated by LCW is building momentum. While it is good that a community planning process has already begun, the process is flawed by the short amount of time and the lack of a commitment to this process by LPS. The New Holy Rosary School is a relatively small project and perhaps the 16-month time frame makes it appear like a short-term project. This project is also in the shadow of a new

high school that is approaching construction in Lawrence. Although LPS must not ignore this small project. Instead LPS should be a major partner in the planning stages and the life of the school since they will have the principal responsibility of operating this community school. Together with LCW, they should be core members of the leadership team.

The challenge then emerges in forming this leadership team under a small timeframe. With more time this team could include parents, students, teachers, LPS staff, the school committee representative, community members, architects, and representatives of potential partnerships. The team would be responsible for insuring that an inclusive community process is used to create the curriculum, structure, and partnerships of the school. Yet, the approaching deadline calls for decisions to be made on the inclusiveness of the leadership team. A core planning committee should be formed consisting of representatives from LCW, LPS, and some of the individuals named above. A smaller group may be more effective in making decisions and implementing them in a short amount of time. Regular meetings should occur between the core planning group and informational presentations should be made periodically to the community to update them on the progress of the school. The lessons from the three cases can be a starting point for the school planning team. As public schools these three case studies offer direct and relevant learning opportunities for the New Holy Rosary School. The team could benefit from visiting the three schools and seeing how a community school operates on a daily basis. These visits could help the team physically visualize the New Holy Rosary School as a community school and not an

abstract possibility. The redevelopment of this school can be an exciting process. The more involved the community feels, the more support the school will have in the neighborhood, and the more this school will be a community school.

### **Challenges for the two partners**

As the main partners in the redevelopment of the Holy Rosary School, LCW and LPS must face important challenges to ensure the success of the new community school.

#### *LPS*

As a district, LPS should be closely involved with school redevelopment projects. With the New Holy Rosary School, the challenge lies in putting aside previously used top-down development practices and instead participating in a partnership-based, participative process. LPS must commit to being involved in this process and trust the experience of LCW and their work in the North Common neighborhood. LCW has already demonstrated their commitment to making this a school that is the result of a community process by initiating the process. It is time for LPS to recognize these efforts and join the team as an equal partner. It would be difficult to make the Holy Rosary School a community school without the support of LCW.

#### *LCW*

LCW is challenged with keeping this process together while not sacrificing the needs of its constituency. LCW was unaware of LPS plans to redevelop the Holy Rosary School. It had already initiated a community process to determine the best use for the building when it learned of the proposed rehabilitation by the

district. Fortunately, the residents of the North Common agreed on redeveloping the vacant building into a school. The main challenge for LCW now is condensing the timeframe of the project while maintaining the integrity of the community school concept and not deceiving the residents of its service area. LCW needs to feel confident that the input of the community and the end product of the planning process will be implemented by LPS. This would require an agreement between LCW and LPS as soon as possible before additional time is spent on organizing the community.

This agreement between LCW and LPS is the most important step in the planning process for this school. Afterwards, the leadership team should be firmly established with regular meetings continuing past the opening of the school. While the design of the new school has not been discussed in this document, it is an essential part of this planning process. The architects for the New Holy Rosary School should be determined soon to involve them in the team. Careful consideration should be made in choosing a firm with experience in community design and the collaborative process for educational facilities. Passion, consensus, and honesty will be necessary to carry this process forward with the end result being a community school grounded in its neighborhood and serving as a center of the community.

## **Reflections**

I was first introduced to the concept of community schools when I enrolled in Professor Strickland's course at MIT entitled "The Paterson Workshop" in the fall of 2000. I

entered MIT thinking that housing was the solution to the problems plaguing urban cores in the United States. The more I read and listened to students, adults, and educators, the more I understood the importance of schools that serve the needs of their students. My idea of how to approach community development expanded to include education, housing, community, and economic development. At the end of the workshop, I produced a report on teacher housing opportunities in downtown Paterson to serve the existing and future academy schools.

I maintained close ties with Professor Strickland and I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work on another project with him in Paterson in the summer of 2001. This project was a collaboration between three MIT students and two high school students from MPACT in an intensive 8-week project to program two new schools in Paterson. We submitted a final report to Superintendent Dr. Durcy that included programming alternatives for a new International High School in the historic district and a K-8 school in close proximity to downtown. Plans are currently underway to construct these two schools.

For the past eight months, I have had the opportunity to work with LCW as a co-instructor for the Young Architects after-school program. This experience has provided great insight into the issues that students face within the public school system in Lawrence. It has also given me an opportunity to become acquainted with the community and begin to understand its complexities. From this experience, it is evident that students in Lawrence need schools that embrace the community school concepts

and engage students in learning. These students are hungry for knowledge and challenging experiences that give value to education. A community school can help accomplish this.

Working with Professor Strickland and the NASDP team and in Lawrence has been an invaluable learning experience. It has not only led me to produce this thesis, but it has shaped the way I approach community development and relationship building. This approach is developing into a practice. This project with the Holy Rosary School in Lawrence is the beginning of practicing how to engage schools in their communities and vice-versa through community partnerships.



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