What is the impact of University High School?

There has been much debate in terms of charter schools and their impact on the local community. Most of these discussions are about racial inequities, financial and programmatic implications (for the sending school districts, and the impact) of charter schools on student achievement. In this local impact analysis, University High School (UHS) will be focusing on the educational impact we will have on the lives of the students and their families of the Providence Public School District (PPSD).

To better understand how UHS will have a positive educational impact on the students of PPSD, we must first dive into the recent findings discovered by the Department of Justice and John’s Hopkins Institution for Educational Policy. It is no secret that PPSD has faced many challenges throughout the past few decades. Just recently (2018), they entered into a settlement agreement with the Department of Justice to rectify shortcomings of their servicing of English Language Learners (ELLs) and their families. Twelve violations were cited and all of the violations fell under four categories: Certification and Training, Parent/Liaison Communication, Program Systems and Structures, and Assessment and Placement.¹ This is concerning since 51% of the ELLs in Rhode Island reside in Providence and 23% of PPSD’s student body is ELLs. According to Kids Count, in 2017 only 2% of ELLs were proficient in ELA and a mere 1% in Math on the PARCC assessment.² Mayor Elorza stated in 2018 that the ELL population in Providence are the largest growing population in the city. The supply for qualified ELL teachers as well as available services and resources does not meet the demand. In addition, Johns Hopkins

Institute for Education Policy released a review of the PPSD (May 2019).³ This review stated that “with rare exceptions teachers are demoralized and feel unsupported.”⁴

Based on the Department of Justice Settlement and the John’s Hopkins report, UHS’s design will have positive educational impacts of PPSD students is three ways:

1. We will provide a strong educational program (grounded in language acquisition, restorative practices, and competency-based education) for the ELL students in the district, including dual-enrollment (graduating high school with stackable certificates, and up to an Associate’s Degree).

2. Support the development of improved teaching practices for the teachers of ELL students across PPSD using our school as a lab site;

3. Support the families of ELL students, furthering Providence’s efforts to be a community that welcomes and supports everyone.

Our commitment to ELLs is organized around the goal of creating an ethos where all learners (every stakeholder, of every color and culture) thrives. This focus will enable UHS to provide a strong high school option for the ELL students and their families.

All educators at UHS will be ELL certified or working towards certification. University College, Roger Williams University has a contract with the PPSD to provide a certification program for PPSD educators to become certified to teach ELLs. With UHS being a practicum school, these educators will have access to observing and/or completing practicum in a UHS classroom where they can observe restorative practices, language acquisition and competency-based education in action. These educators will be more equipped to work with multi-lingual learners by diving deeper into systems and structures that supports language acquisition, aligning


WIDA standards into rigorous secondary and post-secondary curriculum, utilizing real-time assessment and data, and how to work collaboratively to support the wholistic needs of multilingual learners. Due to their hands-on experiences at UHS, these educators will be better prepared to serve students in PPSD.

UHS is committed to restoring (unintentional and/or intentional) harm inflicted on multilingual learners, families, and educators. UHS will utilize restorative practice to build trust, conducive behaviors (self, others, and community), efficacy, social-capital, and cultural fluency. Our systems and structures will be designed to encompass community and relationships as a norm in all that we do. PPSD has been working on restorative practices for the past few years. However, the John’s Hopkins report states the majority of students, staff, and administration do not feel safe in their schools. Sharing how this proven practice works at UHS will have a positive educational impact on PPSD as a whole (students, families, teachers, district personnel, etc…).

Since the initial conception of UHS, UHS has been designing with students, educators, community-based organizations, parents, and University College, Roger Williams University. UHS works diligently to ensure that all voices are heard and not exploited. Because UHS will serve predominantly (if not completely) ELLs (from PPSD), we will be supporting the academic achievement of not only the students and educators at our school, but the students and educators across PPSD. We plan to share with PPSD our learnings around implementations, cultivations of systems/structures, academic pedagogy, social-emotional learning practices, and family outreach that has proven to be effective with servicing this population. The programmatic impact that UHS will have on PPSD will derive a more rigorous, accountable, and supportive teaching and learning environment for all learners.
Bibliography:


