

Innovative Configurations: “Helping Faith-Based Universities and Urban Ministries Implement Effective Educational Practices”

Introduction

On March 8-9, 2012 Wheat Ridge Ministries' Center for Urban Education Ministries (CUEM), in partnership with Concordia University Wisconsin's Urban Education Institute, hosted college representatives, educators, and funders from across the country. This two-day summit showcased models of successful urban education and focused on possible partnerships between urban schools, colleges, and other institutions.

The summit came about, in part, due to a generous contribution from The Siebert Lutheran Foundation. The summit is intended to be a first step in establishing a stronger network of support and resources between Lutheran urban schools and universities throughout the country. In addition, strategies on how urban educators are trained and placed was also examined at length by a number of nationally recognized urban education experts.

Many urban schools struggle with effectiveness, as evidenced by the vast achievement gap between urban and suburban schools. Christian education is making tremendous strides in this area through a number of techniques and strategies. In the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this was evidenced by the schools that summit attendees visited including St. Marcus Lutheran School, The Hope School Prima, and Notre Dame Catholic School. This summit brought many of these strategies to light.

Participants represented schools, universities, and ministry partners from coast to coast.

Goals of the Summit

- Sharing successful innovation strategies
- Connecting high-performing urban education leaders
- Providing action steps for improving urban ministries
- Empowering positive university partnerships with urban ministries

Format of the Summit

- Day one consisted of visits to three exemplary urban schools and concluded with the Kieschnick Lecture delivered by Mr. Peter Groff of MCG2 Consulting.
- Day two of the summit held three different panel sessions with two expert panel presenters per session. Questions and comments were addressed during and after these presentations. In addition, a documentary film on the Mustard Seed School in Hoboken, New Jersey, was viewed and discussed.

Panel One: Urban Leadership

Presenters: Dr. Shirley Roels, The Van Lunen Center for Educational Leadership, and Dr. Andrew Neumann, Educational Enterprises, Inc.

Dr. Roels presented a summary of the Van Lunen Center work on successful urban education leadership.

- Leaders must be passionate about the mission of their schools as well as being managerially adept. Specific characteristics of leaders include forward thinking, masters of reducing the amount of trial-and-error in order to place good leaders and teachers in the appropriate roles.
- As with any institution there is a great deal of consideration that needs to be given to the financial health of the organization. Development of facility and management are important for success. Models for strategic planning and governance must be developed and mastered as well.
- There is a major challenge to the traditional model of Lutheran parish schools; they need to develop a clearly defined relationship with the church and establish respected decision-making boundaries.

Dr. Neumann began his presentation by discussing the trends in U.S. education.

- There are 55.8 million students in schools; there are 100,000 students in Lutheran schools. The global education gap should be of concern to all of us. The United States is no longer a top player in education. In fact, the U.S. is the least efficient at using education funds. The current high unemployment rate will affect the ability of the country to increase or maintain spending on education.
- The Lutheran denomination is losing students which leads to a reduction in quality.
- Opportunities in technology impact education in a tremendous way.
- As Lutheran schools look forward, it can be foreseen that school models will look vastly different. Teachers will have more resources and information at their fingertips. The question arises, “How do we use this to reshape what we’re doing?” The conclusion is that there must be an intersection of private organizations using public funds.
- Dr. Neumann also discussed at length the model of education in the Hope Schools in Milwaukee. They have a focus on the three C’s: Christ, college, and character. The question becomes, “How do we leverage all God has given us to fit new models?” Having a financial model is critical.
- How are Lutheran colleges going to ramp up their programs to prepare teachers for 21st century learning? “Without margin there is no mission.”

Panel Two: Innovative Urban Education Strategies

Presenters: Mr. Henry Tyson, St. Marcus Lutheran School, and Mr. Kole Knueppel, Schools That Can Milwaukee

Mr. Tyson spoke about the old paradigm in which Lutheran schools served the church congregation. As many urban Lutheran congregations are dying, the new paradigm is to reach out to the broader communities. We must be excellent and reach out to children. As a result the question becomes, “How do we (Lutheran schools) reverse 15 years of decline?”

- Mr. Tyson also spoke of the model that St. Marcus employs. St. Marcus began with 56 students in 1981 and has experienced major growth serving over 500 students in 2011 due to critical non-innovative strategies:
 - Strong Leadership
 - Relentlessly High Expectations
 - Dedicated Passionate Teachers
 - Love and Discipline
 - “Whatever it Takes”
 - Student Performance Data
 - Complex Special Education ServicesAs a result, St. Marcus has a 96 percent graduation rate.

- There are a number of innovative strategies that were discussed in Mr. Tyson’s sessions as well. They include:
 - High access to administrators and teachers
 - School leader standing at entrance to school
 - Extended time on task — longer school day from 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.
 - Every child is carefully placed in high school
 - Discover America Program (students in grades 5-8 visit 25 states and 15 colleges before they graduate)
 - Saturday school (two hours of math and reading and one hour of fun; target the lowest 40 percent)
 - Summer school
 - School based ministry teams

Mr. Knueppel also spoke on innovative strategies. There are many questions that come to mind when dealing with urban students and how best to help students succeed. Critical questions that must be examined are:

- To what do we transition students once they have graduated their supportive elementary schools?
- We can take them only so far, but then who takes over?

- The goal for Schools That Can Milwaukee is 20,000 students in high performing schools by 2020. In order to achieve this goal, innovative strategies must be practiced and observed. Those strategies include:
 - Identify high potential schools
 - Coach and mentor leaders and teachers
 - Move from good to great

- Collaboration of character, choice and district leadership teams who intentionally seek to close the achievement gap
- All involved must have integrity
- “Man who says it cannot be done should not interrupt man who is doing.” (Chinese proverb)

Panel Three: University Connections to Urban Schools

Dr. William Henk, Marquette University, and

Dr. Steven Gerner, Concordia University Wisconsin

Dr. Henk spoke as a representative of Catholic higher education. The Greater Milwaukee Catholic Education Consortium (GMCEC) was created out of deep need in Milwaukee’s urban education setting to assist urban Catholic schools. The creation of the consortium happened as a result of the convening of a group of Catholic educators to discuss and evaluate challenges facing their schools. At that point the GMCEC asked what issues the universities could help solve. Three items should be highlighted as strategies from Dr. Henk’s presentation:

- Professional development for teachers, principals, and boards is critical
- The Catholic identity and faith formation is foundational
- Organizational effectiveness (sustainability) plays a tremendous role in success

Dr. Gerner spoke about the importance of engaging in 21st century technologies in training high performing urban teachers. How do we, as professionals, engage faith-based universities to support urban schools? Concordia University Wisconsin (CUW) education students begin their urban experience during freshman year to gain more knowledge and experience. In addition, professors are extremely intentional to place students in high performing schools with exemplary cooperating teachers. Students will experience a variety of teaching models from a number of highly qualified teachers. The ultimate goal is that before graduating, every student will be placed in a residency program for a year with a high-performing teacher.

- Dr. Gerner recommends that all students read “Teach like a Champion” by Doug Lemov.
- School leaders need to make a list of what they need and what universities can do to meet those needs. The key to a win-win situation for both urban schools and universities is an open flow of communication.
- Technology is also a main factor in training educators. CUW has an iPad infusion initiative which is one strategy that will help put technology back into schools.
- CUW partners with a number of universities that function to train urban educators. This organization is the Center for Urban Teaching (CfUT). The group’s strength comes from working together in identifying, preparing and supporting high expectations, respect, and unconditional love. That is a model for success. The CfUT facilitates mentoring programs, runs a summer school program, and provides emergent programs.
- There are a number of barriers to success:
 - Defeatism
 - Ignorance
 - Too many initiatives — need to do a few things really well, not too many things in mediocrity.

Documentary Film: Christine Metzger, former Head of School, Mustard Seed School

The group viewed the documentary film, “A Shared Space: Learning from the Mustard Seed School”. Discussion followed led by Christine Metzger, former head of school. Mustard Seed School employs hands-on, experiential education that integrates strong academics, the arts, faith, and service. Located in an urban setting, the school believes in maximizing the educational experiences of all children regardless of economic or social circumstances. More information about the school and the documentary may be accessed at www.mustardseedschool.org

The Kieschnick Lecture: Mr. Peter Groff, MCG2 Consulting

The text of the Kieschnick Lecture, “The Power of Partnership,” may be accessed at www.wheatridge.org/cuem.

Conclusions

- There is a need to start thinking differently about Lutheran education.
- Successful schools have competent leaders who build competent staff.
- Every child can learn despite their circumstances if given the right tools and environment.
- Lutheran staffs need to be diverse.
- Heads of school model integrity, passion, excellence. They take care of staff and themselves.
- Kids are resilient. Educators should nurture that.
- Urban educators should be in an urban school by choice, not by circumstance.
- Strong urban schools will have a major positive effect on the community.
- We need to learn from one another — share the strong urban models that are working to shrink the achievement gap.
- You can only do what you can dream. Schools must inspire people to dream.
- Model schools have well trained teaching staff and time to plan. The faith of the children is put first and foremost. The best of teachers and students is expected.
- Schools must display an economic understanding of what they need to survive and become sustainable.
- There is a hope for greater college collaboration to support urban schools.
- There were models for cooperative learning.
- Universities can and will play an active role in urban schools.
- Thoughtful strategies are vital to success.

Practical Suggestions

- University administrators can open the lines of communication by simply contacting urban schools to dialogue with them about their needs.
- Urban schools can contact local universities to open the lines of communication with universities to assist in meeting needs.

- Having a clearly defined mission is essential to success. Parish schools can clarify missions and boundaries by simply communicating with the church board.
- Being intentional about training and placing teachers is vital.
- Establishing consistent discipline accompanied by love in schools is needed.
- Make the most of a school day by minimizing breaks or distractions.
- Expect more of students and staff. Clearly define the expectations.
- Establish a clearly defined financial plan for schools.
- Incorporate technology into the classroom and into teacher training.
- Track student and teacher success using data.

Summary

This gathering was the second in a series of summits planned by the Center for Urban Education Ministries surrounding urban education best practices. We believe it is necessary and critical to continue the discussion between like-minded urban educators. Connections were made, resources and ideas were shared. We intend to continue communication with the group, citing progress and sharing ideas.

Participating Organizations

- Better Learning Communities Academy, St. Louis, MO
- Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon, WI
- Educational Enterprises, Inc., Milwaukee, WI
- Holy Family Ministries, Chicago, IL
- LUMIN (Lutheran Urban Mission Initiative) Schools, Milwaukee, WI
- Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI
- South Wisconsin District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS)
- St. Anthony School, Milwaukee, WI
- St. Marcus Lutheran School, Milwaukee, WI
- St. Paul Lutheran School, Chicago, IL
- The Lutheran Foundation of St. Louis, MO
- The New LIFE School, New York, NY
- The Siebert Lutheran Foundation, Brookfield, WI
- Van Lunen Center, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI
- Wheat Ridge Ministries' Center for Urban Education Ministries
- Wisconsin Lutheran College (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod), Milwaukee, WI

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