

OPPportunity High School

The Need

Hartford is a city ravaged by poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. By any measure, Hartford youth are at risk.

Take Daniel - - Daniel is 17 years old and enrolled as a high school freshman in Hartford for the third year in a row. He earned two credits during his first attempt at the ninth grade. Last year, he left school at the end of November because his absences had already made him ineligible for credit in any of the required courses. This year, Daniel is doing well in his art class but struggling in English, math, and science. His art teacher tells him he has the talent for a career in graphic design, but Daniel doesn't see how he'll ever earn the 24 credits required for high school graduation. Adult education isn't an option because that program doesn't accept students under the age of 18. Daniel has trouble finding adequate time to study because he works late hours at a fast food restaurant to help support his family. This is the only job he's ever held for longer than two months.

OPPportunity High School

OPPportunity High School will be the first partnership school in Hartford. Based on a model initiated in New York between Good Shepherd Services and the New York Department of Education, OPPportunity High School will provide the three R's necessary to be successful in school: Rigor, Relevance and Relationships. The school will be a small, academically rigorous diploma-granting high school which combines the unique skills and expertise of Our Piece of the Pie® and the Hartford Public Schools, the two school partners. School governance will be shared equally between the school system and OPP®.

The School's Demographics

OPPportunity High School is for youth who:

- Are 18 years old or younger
- Have at least 1.5 years of high school, but not enough credits to go on to 10th grade
- Are motivated to get a high school diploma

These students have not experienced success in a traditional high school setting, and have given up on themselves and returned to what they know best – life in the streets or menial jobs. OPPportunity High will provide the individualized attention and intensive support services that will help them reduce the barriers they face every day and put them on the path to academic success.

The Partners

Our Piece of the Pie, or OPP, is a youth service agency that weaves together the best of three fields - - youth development, workforce development and education - - to help Hartford's youth become successful adults. Based on the philosophy and belief that with access and opportunity all youth can succeed, OPP provides youth with that access and opportunity. It begins with the relationship that each youth develops with his/her Youth Development Specialist, or YDS. The YDS takes on the role of a life coach and mentor, who helps the youth articulate their dreams and goals, helps them identify the barriers and challenges to those goals and helps them achieve success by becoming that consistent and caring adult in their lives, and by working with them to develop an Individualized Success Plan.

The Hartford Public School system is in the midst of a transformation to become a system composed of small learning communities that provide a variety of options to students throughout the school

system. On the high school level, new schools have been created that appeal to different career interests of youth and provide the rigor that is needed to help them excel in school. There are early signs of success in a school system that has typically been among the lowest-achieving in the state.

OPPortunity High School will combine the best features of both partners. It will combine the rigor of the classroom and high school requirements with best practices in the youth development and workforce development fields so that the combination of the partners' expertise and experience is greater than the sum of its parts. The target result is youth who are ready for college and for careers.

Curriculum and Instruction

This unique setting for academic learning will be coordinated and monitored through the strong collaboration of the Youth Development Specialists, Youth Business Manager and Academic Instructors who will deliver instruction in multiple settings and different modalities. Capital Workforce Partners' Career competency system which defines skills essential to career success and provides tools for teaching, assessment, tracking progress, and engaging employers, will also be included in the school's curriculum. Instructional technology will play a central role in the school, allowing students to work on their own, with teachers, or with YDSs to make use of supplemental instructional materials, apply new skills and knowledge in ways that complement their learning styles and types of intelligence, and access on-line learning opportunities. All curricula will be aligned with 21st Century Skills, a model that identifies competencies needed to be competitive in the future workforce.

School Calendar and Course Credits

Courses of study will be divided into four twelve-week semesters. This year-round calendar allows for rolling admissions, thereby not having long waiting times for those currently motivated to return to school. It provides a continuous timeframe that supports current students to earn credits and engage in school. The high school will also establish an AP program and articulation agreements with colleges for dual credit courses including on-line course credit opportunities. Additionally, the school will investigate and implement an accelerated credit process where credits toward graduation requirements may be awarded on a course competency system rather than seat time and Carnegie units.

School Status

Now that the school has been approved by the Board of Education, hiring of the school's co-directors will begin. The co-directors are the school principal and the OPP Youth Development Director.

The school will open in August, 2009 with up to 100 ninth grade students who are over-aged and under-credited. At full enrollment, the school will have approximately 200 students. The high school will engage students by providing an educational environment that mirrors the workplace. In collaboration with community and business partners, the school will combine an academically rich curriculum and workforce readiness skills to deliver what students need to become effective global citizens, college students and successful workers.

