



Artfully Done by Bob Kloos

Urban Community School: still in the city, still preparing kids

Beacon Street is returning to Urban Community School to address bullying on campus. No, we are not being asked to return because the situation has worsened. This time, we are invited to bring our "We First" program to a group of students and teachers who are looking to ramp up their effort to regard everyone equally, with respect and reverence. The grant we recently received from the Giant Eagle Foundation is underwriting this endeavor.

Urban Community School (UCS) is an independent, non-graded elementary school serving 450 students from a Montessori preschool (age three) through the eighth grade.

The school's "mission is to provide an individualized, Catholic/Christian, quality education to the children of Cleveland's Near West Side neighborhoods, primarily to those who, otherwise, might not have access to such an education. UCS offers an alternative to traditional education to better meet the needs of an unstable, volatile, and sometimes violent community." A quote from a kindergarten student can be found on the UCS web site: "We treat others like we want to be treated." Simply stated, that's the goal of the renewed efforts at Urban right now.

UCS was established in 1968 by the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland, concerned teachers, community activists, and two inner city parishes, St. Patrick and St. Malachi. UCS is regarded as a model of urban education. The school has received both local and national recognition for excellence and leadership in developing an educational program that effectively motivates inner city children to achieve success in the classroom and beyond.

In 1987 UCS was the first school in Cleveland to receive the Excellence in Education Award from the U.S. Department of Education. In 2000, the UCS Board of Trustees unanimously voted to expand the school to serve more children. According to the school's web site (urbancommunityschool.org), UCS opened the 2005-2006 school

year in a new building with an additional 50 students at 4909 Lorain. Urban stayed in the neighborhood. And there is even room to grow.

Beacon Street has engaged the students of UCS several times over the past few years, during the school year and over the summer, on campus and off. Last January, we helped launch a Bully Prevention initiative. At a recent meeting, a teacher quipped that students still "replay" some of the components of that program. But it is a new year and, a beautiful new building notwithstanding, some of the students have managed to bring along their old insecurities and troubles. Incidents of bullying and teasing still surface.

In discussions about the topic, students respond: "Bullying is entertaining." Those who are challenged for what they have done respond with: "I was just playing. He (she) knows I didn't mean it." But the hurt says otherwise. This urban school believes kids should feel safe on campus, highly regarded as a unique child of God. UCS made that very clear at the October dedication ceremony of their new facility: "This is Holy Ground," principal Pam Delly said, "because of who come through these doors every day."

A core committee of teachers has been monitoring progress since the kick-off a year ago. And it is fair to say they are not just trying to address incidents that occur. More importantly, they want the entire school community to focus on building an atmosphere that is positive and affirming.

Everyone at UCS would be better off if they were greeted daily with encouraging words, compliments, and a cheerful welcome. That kind of environment would leave little room for negative speech or behavior. Anyone can make rules to address disruptive behaviors, but Urban is making the effort to foster an environment that is less likely to spawn aggressive and demeaning assaults.

Part of their strategy was to survey the students to obtain detailed information from another