

# The Abell Report

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## Atlanta's Successful Charles R. Drew Charter School: the Cornerstone of East Lake's Community Transformation *Baltimore's Version Invites Comparison*

### Baltimore's "East Lake": East Baltimore Development Inc. and the new Henderson- Hopkins school

The Elmer A. Henderson: A Johns Hopkins Partnership School, also known as Henderson-Hopkins, is the first new Baltimore public school building in East Baltimore in more than 20 years and serves as a cornerstone for the largest redevelopment project in Baltimore: East Baltimore Development, Inc. (EBDI). Like East Lake in Atlanta, this project seeks community transformation with a unique school as its centerpiece.

#### East Baltimore History

From their origins in the late 19th century through the 1950s, the many district neighborhoods of East Baltimore were bustling working-class communities. Beginning in the 1960s, however, these neighborhoods, like many others in the city, were devastated by the dramatic loss of manufacturing jobs; the ruinous riots of the late 1960s, and the exodus of first white, then African-American, middle-class families; and the epidemics of drugs, crime, and abandonment.

The Middle East neighborhood,  
*continued on page 7*

By: Linda Eberhart and Tara Barnes

The community of East Lake, home to Charles R. Drew Charter School (Drew), is 6 miles from downtown Atlanta. In 1995, crime in East Lake was 19 times higher than the national average. Now, violent crime is down 95 percent. In 1995, 88 percent of residents were unemployed. Now, only 5 percent receive welfare. In 1995, just 5 percent of fifth graders at Charles R. Drew Elementary School met state standards in math. Now, more than 90 percent of **all** students at Drew meet or exceed state standards in **all** subject areas.

Many urban school communities face similar academic crises to the one that existed in the East Lake Community of Atlanta in 1995: dismal academic results and generations of students leaving school ill-prepared for college or a career, perpetuating a cycle of poverty. In East Lake and at the Charles R. Drew Charter School that cycle of poverty has been disrupted. This transformation has received national attention as a model of success and provides lessons for other urban communities searching for best practices to break that same cycle.

#### The Impetus for Change

The transformation of this community school grew out of a movement to renovate the East Lake neighborhood

from one of intense poverty and violence to a safe and stable mixed-income community.

After reading a 1993 *New York Times* editorial stating that 74 percent of prisoners in the New York state prison system came from just eight neighborhoods, philanthropist Tom Cousins was inspired to research that same statistic in Atlanta. He discovered that it held true, with most inmates coming from just three neighborhoods, one of which was East Lake. Cousins decided to attempt to change that statistic. In conjunction with East Lake residents, Tom Cousins established the East Lake Foundation in 1995. The Foundation, in partnership with Atlanta's Housing Authority, reshaped the landscape of the neighborhood by tearing down 650 existing public-housing units and the existing Charles R. Drew Elementary School. The neighborhood was rebuilt with a 542-unit mixed-income apartment complex called The Villages of East Lake, along with a new school facility, and a number of additional community assets: the East Lake Family YMCA; a Sheltering Arms Early Education and Family Center; and the 9-hole, mid-length, public Charlie Yates Golf Course.

Residents in the "new" East Lake community are subject to certain requirements: they must either work or be enrolled in school; 30 percent of their wages must go toward rent; and they must pass a criminal background check.

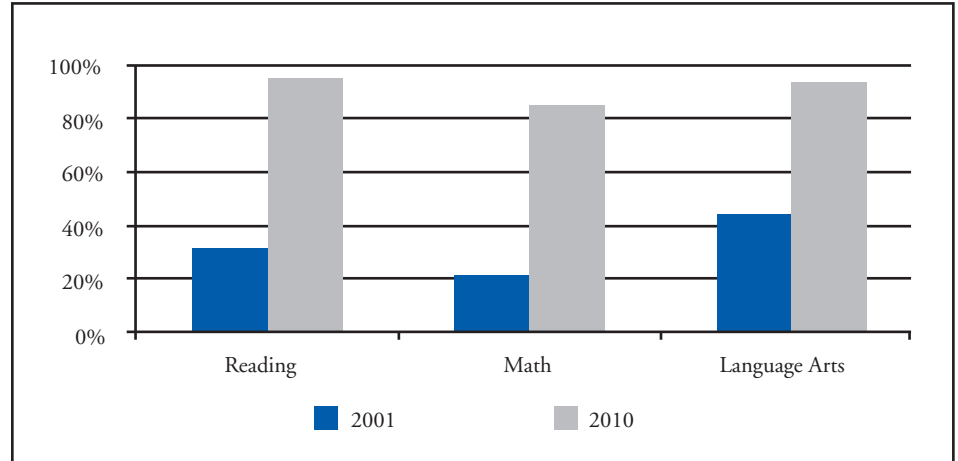
### Changing Demographics and School Achievement Data

This comprehensive approach to community revitalization has helped to transform the East Lake neighborhood from an exclusively low-income community to a mixed-income community. Half of all units in East Lake are reserved for affordable housing, while the other half are open to middle-income families who pay market rate. As of 2010, the average home price was \$280,000, compared to \$20,000 a decade before.

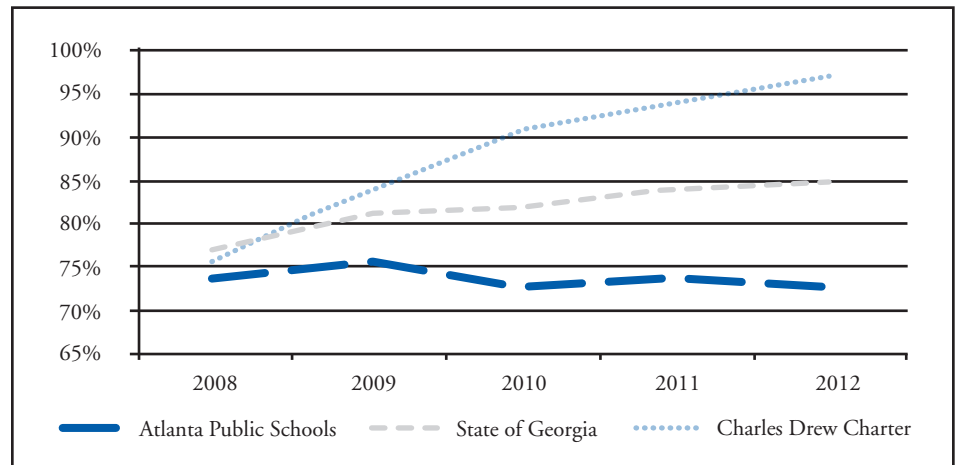
Just as the East Lake neighborhood has been transformed in socio-economic status, so has the school. In 1995, 100 percent of students qualified for free and reduced meals. In 2012, the number was 68 percent. The changing face of the school is a reflection of the changing community around it, and because change occurred in the school and the community simultaneously—as a deliberately planned event—it is difficult to separate the two when examining the success of either one. The school’s success was certainly influenced by the changing nature of the neighborhood around it, and the neighborhood’s success was certainly impacted by the “new” Charles R. Drew Charter School.

The academic performance of Charles Drew School began improving before the community development - and ensuing integration - were complete. In 2005, a majority of students were already passing state reading and math tests. Officials at the foundation’s national offshoot, Purpose Built Communities, say that while mixing students of different backgrounds is important to their success, integration alone isn’t enough to close the achievement gap.

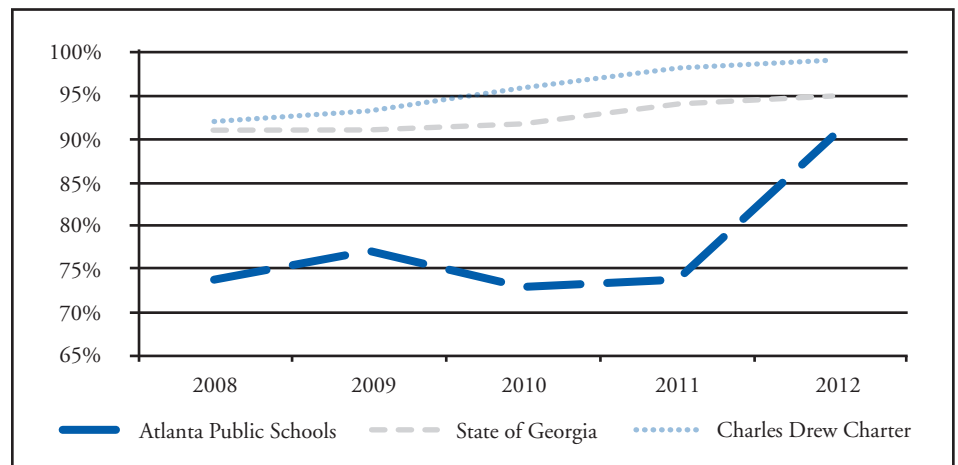
### Drew Charter Students Who Meet or Exceed Standards in Grade 4



### CRCT: Reading (Percent Passing)



### CRCT: Mathematics (Percent Passing)



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## 2012 CRCT (Georgia's State Test) Scores \*

The % of Drew Charter Students *who meet or exceed state standards*:

Grade	Reading	Language Arts	Math	Science	Social Studies
3	100%	100%	97.5%	97.5%	98.7%
4	98.9%	100%	94.8%	97.9%	96.9%
5	98.7%	98.7%	97.4%	92.1%	96.1%
6	97.9%	100%	98.9%	91.8%	95.9%
7	100%	98.9%	100%	97.8%	95.6%
8	100%	98.9%	97.8%	91.1%	92.2%

\*In Georgia, students have an opportunity to retake the test if they failed. In grades 3, 5 and 8 it is required that students pass the test in order to be promoted, unless the parent successfully appeals the retention. Usually summer school is offered to those students who failed the test, and students re-take the test at the completion of summer school.

Before the community transformation occurred, less than a third of students at Charles R. Drew Elementary School met reading and math standards on state tests, and the school was ranked last in the city. In 2012, Charles R. Drew Charter School had the fourth-highest test scores in the state, and 98 percent of eighth graders met or exceeded state standards, compared to the statewide rate of 77 percent.

This rise in achievement did not happen overnight. Many factors contributed to the current success of the school. Significant practices are in place that derive from converting to a charter, practices driven by the school and their internal budget, and those practices connected to outside funding and partnerships.

### Benefits of Charter School Conversion

Rebuilding the school meant closing the existing Charles R. Drew Elementary School and opening the Charles R. Drew Charter School in 2000. In 2013, Drew opened the 9th grade of its new high school and currently serves more than 1,200 students from Pre-K through ninth

grade. It has inherited many benefits of being a charter, including:

- Attracting students and families from outside the school community;
- Gaining a higher level of commitment from those students and families; and
- Having increased flexibility with school resources.

### Attracting Families Through Lottery

Drew is required to accept all families from the Villages of East Lake Community before going outside of the immediate neighborhood. The 2013 lottery for acceptance into Drew received 1,330 applications for 130 open spots (this number reflects an expansion in both preschool and primary classes). The demand for Drew has grown over the years, due in large part to the reputation for success; however, the ability to attract a portion of its students from outside of the neighborhood cannot be overlooked as a significant factor that contributes to the school's economically and racially diverse community.

### Commitment from Families

Attending Drew is a family commit-

ment. A minimum of 20 hours of volunteer service is required from each attending family. Although there is a good deal of parental involvement, the commitment from parents is more pronounced in support of administrative recommendations that impact students. For example, administrators have increased leverage when they ask for struggling students to participate in outside-of-class tutoring. Parents are expected to support initiatives like these that help build academic achievement.

### Flexibility with Resources

Charter schools have more flexibility than traditional schools in terms of time, staff, funds, and the decisions surrounding these resources.

**Time** - As a charter, Drew has the flexibility to implement an extended day and extended year, and has used this extra time strategically. This flexibility in decision-making allows the school to put research into practice and realize an impact on student achievement.

**Staff** - Drew also maintains autonomy to recruit, hire, and fire its staff. Teachers work on a one-year contract and can be terminated with two weeks' notice. This is a significant advantage to create the staff needed to support a common vision. Elementary administrator Barbara Preuss indicated that in 2005, there was an administration-led turnover in staff, after which test scores increased to above 90 percent. This was a deliberate move to ensure the school employed teachers who held high expectations for students. During the 2011-12 school year, there was a 93 percent retention rate among teachers at the school.

Because teachers at Drew are not part of a union, the administration can determine working conditions outlined in the contract without having to go through formal negotiations. This is particularly important when it comes to collaborative planning time for teachers, which is set at 75 minutes daily for job-embedded professional opportunities.

Typically, Drew uses a 60-minute block of this time twice per week for coordinated professional development activities; however, administrators can utilize additional designated time more frequently, if needed. In the beginning of the charter conversion, that time was used daily for professional development. Preuss attributes Drew's high teacher-retention rate in part to the fact that teachers get "all the support and resources they need."

In general, comparisons between Drew teachers and other Atlanta teachers are as follows:

- Drew teachers are paid according to the Atlanta salary scale. However, Drew teachers enter the scale one step higher than they would be teaching at other city schools. This salary difference then commits these teachers to the longer school day (1.5 additional hours per day) and five extra teaching days per year;
- Drew teachers are given the same health benefits as teachers in other city schools; and
- Drew teachers do not "own" their planning time. The 75 minutes of daily planning they receive can be used by the administration for professional development, if needed.

**Funds** - Another resource not available to traditional schools but afforded to Drew is the opportunity to apply for individual state and federal grants. The school just received a \$1,000,000 Race to the Top grant for project-based learning through the state. This is a significant source of funding, allowing it to build and sustain innovative learning projects.

## Practices Supported by School Funding

No single textbook, program, or instructional strategy has been given credit for Drew's success. Although the school still has a partnership with

its operator, Edison Learning, it does not drive any instructional practice, but rather provides administrative and operational support. What is evident is that strategic decisions have been made by the school's leadership in response to students' needs. Two of these decisions in particular have made an impact: additional learning time and strategic curricular choices.



*"In 2012,  
Charles R. Drew  
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the fourth highest test  
scores in the state."*



### Additional Learning Time

School leadership is committed to extra learning time for students. All students attend school daily from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., which amounts to 1.5 additional hours. Students also have an extended year. They attend school for a total of 185 days, which is five more days than Atlanta Public Schools. The ability to have an extended day and year is a choice that Drew can make because it is a charter school and uses its internal funds to support this. Charles Drew students who attend the school from grades K to eight receive 2.5 more years of education than their Atlanta Public Schools peers.

The extra learning time allows students to have more time on differentiated learning, additional enrichment classes, and time for intervention support outside of the regular class, along with longer, daily collaboration time for teachers.

**Response to Intervention (RTI):** Response to Intervention provides additional learning time outside the typical

instructional block and is required for all Drew students. During a 45-minute RTI session, teachers create flexible groups to remediate and extend learning based on an individual student's needs. This differentiated learning block gives students more targeted instruction. Enrichment teachers are used strategically during this time to "push in" to the classroom and enable smaller student groups. Three days a week are devoted to literacy and two are centered on mathematics. The skills change on a regular basis and students are flexibly grouped based on their needs for that skill—whether it is remediation, additional on-level practice, or extension.

**Enrichment Classes:** With the support of partners, administrators at Drew have made strategic decisions to use a portion of the "extended day" to offer appealing enrichment opportunities. All students have the choice of two enrichment classes that meet daily. These include art, dance, technology, robotics, chorus, band, orchestra, foreign language, golf, swimming, and more.

Enrichment classes give students well-rounded experiences, and the school has numerous partnerships that enhance these opportunities. The East Lake Foundation allows students to use the public golf course for golfing class. The partnership with the YMCA gives students the opportunity to take swim classes for physical education. Georgia Tech students and staff provide mentoring and support for the robotics program where students apply their science and math knowledge to engineer robots for competition. The menu of fine arts classes includes two dance troupes, five choruses, four bands, an orchestra, and theater. All students take violin in the third grade, and the Atlanta Symphony provides concerts and pre-concert lessons for students. The ability to offer a wide variety of enrichment classes makes the school appealing to parents and students, increasing the number of applicants wishing to attend Drew.



**Professional Development for Teachers:** Because of the added enrichment classes that students receive, teachers are afforded 75-minute collaborative planning periods daily that can be used for professional development. The school partners with the Westminster Teaching Center, where they conduct action research to improve practice. The school has other partners, such as Newtech, that provide support around project-based learning.

**Math Lab and Literacy Center:** The Math Lab and Literacy Center provide intense intervention for struggling students. Students are assigned to visit the Math Lab or Literacy Center in lieu of attending an enrichment class. Parents agree because of the critical need to fill skill gaps in literacy or math. Both the Math Lab and Literacy Center are staffed with two certified teachers and one to two paraprofessionals. Students work in small groups on targeted interventions. Some interventions are computer based, while others put students in small skill-based groups to work with a teacher. Students who attend these interventions are assessed on an ongoing basis to determine movement out of this intervention. Materials for the Literacy Center are funded through an annual \$50,000 donation from the Rotary Club of Atlanta.

**Saturday School:** Drew offers Saturday School from October through April for students who need additional time on learning. Two teachers for each grade level drive the learning and are paid a stipend of \$30 per hour. About 200 students in grades three through eight attend. Saturday School runs on internal charter school funds.

### Curricular Choices

From 2000 to 2005, the curricular choices at Drew were based on recommendations from Edison Learning. The school used *Soar to Success* for reading, and test scores began to improve.

According to Preuss, the school changed reading and math resources and instructional strategies when “Soar to Success only got us so far.” Around 2006, the school switched reading programs to *Reading Street* by Scott Foresman. At about the same time, it implemented a Singapore approach to mathematics. Both changes occurred in response to students’ needs and came about with buy-in from groups of teachers who explored a variety of programs and resources. With the introduction of the Common Core State Standards in 2013, the school is responding by moving to another approach to reading. According to the school’s reading coordinator, it will use a phonics-based program, along with the use of anthologies, as its core reading program.

The overall curricular approach of the school is called STEAM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics. It also incorporates a strong foundation in literacy. A partnership with Georgia Tech Center for Education Integrating Science, Mathematics, and Computing is instrumental in helping teachers implement this integrated curricular approach. The Georgia State University School of Music partners with Drew on the Sound Learning program to integrate academics and music.

During the school year 2011-12, Drew also initiated a project-based learning approach. Teachers received professional development from Newtech and spent time over the summer at the Buck Institute to support implementation. The expectation is that this approach to teaching and learning will happen in all grade levels. The purchase of classroom furniture reflects alignment with this goal. Classes are beginning to be furnished with desks that roll so that students can be flexibly grouped in order to work collaboratively on projects. As Drew expands to a high school next year, the new building is designed with flexible space to enhance collaboration, including seven project-based

learning labs and “21st century learning commons,” which facilitate research and communication.



***The East Lake Foundation is a key partner with Drew, providing after-school programming and early learning support.***



This year’s instructional focus has been on understanding the Common Core State Standards and infusing technology. The school uses its collaborative time (up to 75 minutes daily) to support teachers in this work. Drew is also a SMART demonstration site. SMART boards are interactive whiteboards that utilize touch detection for input. They are used in whole- or small-group instruction where students manipulate text and/or images to deepen their learning experience. To be a demonstration site, all classrooms are equipped with this technology.

### Practices Supported by Outside Funding

#### East Lake Foundation Partnership

The East Lake Foundation was established to help transform the East Lake neighborhood and create new opportunities for families. The mission of the foundation is to break the cycle of poverty by creating and funding educational, recreational, and self-sufficiency programs for community residents, while providing amenities that attract mixed-income residents and private investment to the community. This foundation is a key partner with Drew.

### ***After-school programming***

Drew's after-school program is offered from 4:15 p.m. to 6 p.m. daily and funded entirely by the East Lake Foundation. The coordinator is an employee of Drew, but her salary is supported by the foundation. Two of the five after-school days per week are devoted to academics, while the other three are enrichment activities. Of the 350 students attending last year, approximately 50 percent were in grades K through two, 30 percent were in grades three through five, and 20 percent were in grades six through eight. This translates to about 58 percent of all K through two students in after-school programming, along with 38 percent of all students in grades three through five, and 29 percent of all students in grades six through eight. Adults who are not regular classroom teachers at the school staff the after-school program.



***“There is a significant focus at Drew on preparing students to enter kindergarten on a path ‘to read to learn’ by grade three.”***



### **Early Learning Support**

The local YMCA supports the East Lake Early Learning Academy for 97 children from ages 6 weeks to 3 years. It is physically connected to the Drew Charter School building. The Early Learning Academy uses The Creative Curriculum for Preschool, developed by Teaching Strategies, Inc., based in Washington, D.C. Last year, all

students transitioned directly into Drew's Pre-K classes.

The Sheltering Arms daycare center is also located in the East Lake Community and serves approximately 136 children from ages 6 weeks to 4 years. The daycare center relies on a mix of funding from private philanthropic sources, federal, state, and county resources, and tuition. It, too, uses The Creative Curriculum for Preschool. On average, every Sheltering Arms child meets or exceeds 96 percent of the developmental milestones for his or her age and stage of development by the end of the school year. Seventy-five percent of students transition directly into Drew's kindergarten classes. There is close coordination between Sheltering Arms and Drew to transition students into kindergarten, including monthly collaborative meetings between the daycare director and Drew's principal.

### **Pre-Kindergarten**

There is a significant focus at Drew on preparing students to enter kindergarten on a path “to read to learn” by grade three. To do this, the school utilizes support of outside funders to provide high-quality staff, a low student/teacher ratio, and a whole language immersion program to compensate for reading-readiness gaps.

Each Pre-K class of 22 students is staffed with two certified teachers and one assistant, also with a college degree. Drew's Pre-K students have the same extended day and extended year as all other Drew students.

Drew's recognition that its students typically enter school with large language deficits in vocabulary and exposure to books has driven its use of an intense whole-language approach to teaching and learning. It uses the programs *Opening the World with Learning and Growing with Mathematics*. Its programming is developed in an ongoing partnership with the Rollins Center for Language and Learning at Atlanta Speech School.

The Cox Foundation has committed \$2.5 million over the next five years to support the Pre-K program of 66 students.

### **Lessons Learned**

More than a decade ago, all academic measures at Charles Drew Elementary School reflected a community caught in a cycle of poverty: low test scores amid a neighborhood with a dangerously high crime rate and joblessness. What initiated the break in this cycle was the well-planned, coordinated renovation of both the community and school. The simultaneous transformation of East Lake's housing stock from low-income to mixed-income and the re-making of the school made Drew an attractive option for families living outside the neighborhood.



***“What initiated the break in this cycle was the well-planned coordinated renovation of both the community and the school.”***



In addition, re-opening the school as a charter brought about many advantages that have led to more flexibility in resources and the ability to create a mixed-income community. The option to become a charter is not always available to schools, and alone, may not lead to successful transformation.

A cadre of administrators over the years at Drew has contributed to its success by strategically using internal funds for programming and curricular choices. While some of these decisions

rely on the ability to be flexible with resources—as granted through its charter status—many of the decisions are simply based on recognizing students’ needs and responding to them appropriately.

Outside partners and funding wrap around and touch many of the curricular decisions and programs initiated at Drew, which has sustained its success. Without these strategic partners, the impact of these programs would not be as dramatic. Outside partners play a big role in Drew’s ability to provide resources that attract families and provide vital resources for students.

The cycle of poverty has been broken in the East Lake Community, with Charles R. Drew Charter School as a foothold in the success story. The school gives children great opportunities to achieve at high levels and exceed expectations, which has dramatically impacted the community. Charles R. Drew Charter School is a national success story of transformation with many layers of lessons for other schools and districts to learn from.

### Authors:

**Linda Eberhart** spent the first part of her career as a master elementary teacher, and was honored as the 2002 Maryland Teacher of the Year. She then served as the executive director of Teaching and Learning in Baltimore City Schools, overseeing all curriculum and instruction, prior to her retirement. She currently serves on the Maryland State Board of Education.

**Tara Barnes** is a National Board Certified teacher who has been working with Baltimore City Schools for 15 years.

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north of the Johns Hopkins medical campus, bore the brunt of these urban maladies. Ten years after the launch of the EBDI transformation project, the Middle East neighborhood is turning the corner with new investments in family support services; workforce development initiatives; and housing, office, retail, and open spaces. When completed, the project will include 2,100 units of mixed-income homeownership and rental housing units, 1.7 million square feet of life sciences research and office space, a new 7-acre community learning campus (Henderson-Hopkins) with an early childhood center and a public K-8 elementary school, fresh food stores and other retail amenities, green spaces, and a new community park.

### School Impact

Henderson-Hopkins is the keystone of this multi-million dollar transformation under way in East Baltimore. As a contract school within Baltimore City Schools, Henderson-Hopkins receives a greater degree of autonomy. Opening its new \$53 million building in January 2014, the school will welcome 368 students; when fully enrolled, Henderson-Hopkins will serve more than 700 students annually, including approximately 540 K-8 students and 170 early childhood learners. Children, 6 weeks of age through eighth grade, will learn and grow in a state-of-the-art 118,000-square-foot facility designed in a national competition as an exemplar 21st century learning environment, with ample natural light, open and dynamic blended learning spaces, technology integration, and an emphasis on holistic learning practices.

Henderson-Hopkins will emphasize individualized learning, and family and community involvement supported by wrap-around services to help each

child achieve his/her full potential. By placing an emphasis on physical and social development as well as academic achievement, Henderson-Hopkins will provide an environment where all children are given the opportunity to develop foundational skills to help them when they enter kindergarten, high school, and eventually college.

In 2011, the Johns Hopkins School of Education (SOE) assumed the role of designer and chief operator of what was formerly known as the East Baltimore Community School, in partnership with Morgan State University’s School of Education and Urban Studies. All teachers are hired through the Baltimore City Public School District. Although the SOE has the primary responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the school, with Morgan State assuming the primary governance representation of the partnership, the new Henderson-Hopkins facility will allow for complete implementation of the distinguishing principles.

### Distinguishing Principles

For many urban communities, closing the achievement gap and breaking the cycle of poverty are critical factors to building capacity and improving outcomes for children and families. With access to key corporate and foundation partnerships and a mindset for innovation, the SOE will implement fundamental evidence-based research principles that will distinguish Henderson-Hopkins and be a prototype for other school communities—strategically fostering a mixed-ability, mixed-income setting; integrating a data-informed personalized learning approach throughout the curriculum; and creating strong community engagement.

As a demographically diverse school, Henderson-Hopkins, by design, will have a balanced representation of students who live and work in the redeveloping community. Currently, 88 percent of students at

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*continued from page 7*

Henderson-Hopkins receive Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS), but the goal is to reduce that figure to 60 percent. Henderson-Hopkins students attend a lengthened school day from 8:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Personalized learning is the most distinguishing aspect that sets Henderson-Hopkins apart from traditional K-8 schools. Personalized learning is a student-centered approach that aligns curricula with individual learning styles and skills in order to achieve maximum competence and confidence. It is a measurable and appreciable holistic approach to learning that includes a blend of cognitive, social-emotional, and physical goals that combine face-to-face and technology-based educational activities driven by a comprehensive data system aligned to the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards.

Students will experience small class sizes, a highly targeted curriculum, and a wide range of enrichment activities that will provide the best possible

learning experience to help them achieve their academic goals. Backed by Johns Hopkins University (JHU), the school will also benefit from the university’s Center for Research and Reform in Education, Center for Talented Youth, Peabody Institute, Center for the Social Organization of Schools, Urban Health Institute, Athletics Department, and schools of medicine, nursing, and public health. Expertise drawn from JHU faculty and programs will be integrated into the ongoing professional development for Henderson-Hopkins faculty.

At the heart of this effort is an awareness of the importance of a comprehensive approach to education success from an early age. The early childhood center will provide children (ages 6 weeks through 5 years) and their families with access to an innovative prevention-oriented early education and intervention program to help promote the academic growth of children, enhance the quality of parent-child and family interactions, facilitate parental self-sufficiency, and help empower families to approach life in a pro-active and positive manner. The intention to co-locate the school with an early learning facility will

help support the aim to have a larger percentage of entering kindergarten students fully prepared for the kindergarten year.

Henderson-Hopkins will also offer a Coordinated School Health Program (CSHP) with a system of health services, education, and support for children from 6 weeks old through the eighth grade, and their families. Rather than a primary care center or school-based health center, the program will be anchored by a Health Suite that combines school health services with school-linked services delivered off-site.

### Community Engagement

**Family Support:** The 5,000-square-foot Family Resource Center and a new 3,000-square-foot library will be a gathering space where families find encouragement and support, have access to a range of digital and print resources, and are afforded opportunities to meet with other parents. The SOE is looking to develop a three-tiered continuum of holistic and wrap-around family support that is inclusive to all Henderson-Hopkins families, regardless of socio-economic situation.

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