

Centers for Educational Excellence: “Urban Renewal” for Teachers and Educational Nonprofits

Donald Manekin and Gabe Canuso 24 October 2012

Introduction

Among competing theories of what it takes to dramatically improve public schools K-12, study after study continues to reveal that teacher effectiveness is essential. In fact, excellent teachers appear to matter more in student achievement than any other factor. Yet recruiting, developing and retaining excellent teachers is an ongoing challenge, particularly in urban areas. In addition, while many nonprofit organizations can provide critical support to public schools, they often face and may succumb to high rents, lack of adequate physical resources and missed opportunities to maximize efforts in partnerships with other nonprofits. In Baltimore, and soon in Philadelphia, Centers for Educational Excellence address both challenges. They provide convenient, amenity-rich, affordable housing for teachers and below-market-rate office space with shared amenities for education-focused nonprofits. Housed in completely transformed, formerly empty or underutilized historic buildings, the Centers also

contribute to urban-neighborhood revitalization.

Cities Desperately Need Capable, Dedicated Teachers

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Throughout the U.S., we're seeing significant re-commitment to K-12 public education. More successfully preparing our next generations for post-secondary education and the workforce has become a real national priority. Urban areas, in particular, recognize they must find new approaches, given that so many children:

- Enter school unprepared for either academic or social success,
- Routinely fall grade levels behind,
- Drop out of the system altogether, and
- Leave high school unprepared for college or the workforce.

The importance of capable, dedicated teachers is at the heart of our national discussion on improving public education. Evidence seems clear that good teachers matter more to student achievement than any other factor. Yet school districts across the country are struggling to recruit and retain outstanding individuals to serve as educators, role models and leaders for a generation of children left behind on the path to

emotional, social and financial well-being.

Even when potentially excellent new teachers are hired, many succumb to a high level of professional burnout, leaving the classroom for careers offering more support, prestige and pay. These promising educators *must* receive adequate support to learn, practice and hone professional skills required in this demanding profession.

Urban School Systems Depend on Education-related Nonprofits

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Public schools are also understanding that educational nonprofit organizations can play a valuable role as partners in K-12 education and beyond. Hundreds of such organizations are now active across the country: Teach for America, Scholar Academies, Building Educated Leaders for Life, New Leaders, and KIPP Academy are notable examples. Such organizations can help to recruit and train teachers and principals, provide ongoing support to teachers, and offer critical support services to students and parents.

Governments and corporate and philanthropic supporters have challenged educational nonprofit organizations to work together to gain economies of scale and find meaningful ways to collaborate. However, these

organizations' scattered locations and often-constrained budgets frequently prevent the development of strategic collaboration plans. And, many organizations are paying too much for space they may not be able to use optimally. As funding to nonprofits becomes more limited, and as donors shy away from paying for operating costs, these organizations *must* become more efficient and resourceful to help teachers and students succeed.

Real Estate Innovation can Support Teachers, Educational Nonprofits and Communities

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In 2007, Baltimore-based Seawall Development Company was founded by the father/son team of Donald and Thibault Manekin to seek a real estate solution that would:

- Help attract and retain the best and brightest teachers to our nation's cities,
- Create cost-effective, efficient, collaborative work environments for teachers and educational nonprofits, and
- Help revitalize urban communities in the process.

The initial concept developed by Seawall was to turn a long-abandoned historic structure into a vibrant, mixed-

use complex that would provide beautiful, high-quality apartments for teachers new to Baltimore. It would also offer efficient, cost-effective and collaborative office space for education-focused nonprofits. Both living and office spaces would be provided at discounted rents. Once transformed, the revitalized building would become a hub of collaboration, idea sharing and educational reform. The concept also assumed that such a hub could breathe new life back into a portion of the city long devoid of economic development.

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In 2009, Seawall and its partners (Enterprise Community Investment, US Bank, Sun Trust, Marks-Thomas Architects, and Hamel Builders) opened the doors to Miller's Court, the nation's first Center for Educational Excellence. A \$20,000,000, 85,000-square foot, Gold LEED-certified building, Miller's Court features 40 apartments for teachers and 35,000 square feet of office space for nonprofit organizations playing an important role in the success of the Baltimore City Public Schools. The Miller's Court project was so successful that the Baltimore Seawall team has replicated the model in another historic mill building, Union Mill.

National Implementation Begins in Philadelphia

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In October 2012, work began to transform Philadelphia's historic Quaker City Dye Works complex in the Kensington/Fishtown district into a vibrant hub of education-related activity. By spring 2014, the revitalized complex, a Center for Educational Excellence newly named Oxford Mills, will provide over 35,000-square feet of office space and 114 modern apartments.



The Quaker City Dye Works complex before work began.

More than half these apartments will be reserved for teachers at below-market rates, and office space will be occupied by education-related nonprofits. Seawall's Philadelphia partners in this groundbreaking project include D3 Development, TD Bank, Enterprise Community Investment, Philadelphia Industrial Development



A projected image of how Oxford Mills will appear after work is complete.

Astutely-developed Living Space can Help Recruit, Develop and Retain Teachers

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Currently, 20,000 Teach for America alumni are involved in addressing educational inequity in communities across the country. In Baltimore, 345 TFA corps members now serve Baltimore City Public Schools students, and 625 alumni have made Baltimore their permanent home after their corps service. Many alumni have remained in the classroom; others are now serving as principals and senior administrative staff in the school system; still others are working in or leading other nonprofit

organizations that are making Baltimore a great place to live and work. Had it not been for their Teach for America experience, these individuals would most likely not have come to Baltimore. (These results mirror those in other major urban centers where Teach for America is located.)

In Philadelphia, 267 TFA corps members now work within the school system, and 950 alumni are serving the Philadelphia region. The Oxford Mills development team anticipates serving another 50 TFA corps members as well as their regional office team.

Miller's Court and Union Mill have been, and Oxford Mills will be, a critical mechanism to support the ability of new teachers to come to and remain in their cities. Previously, teachers were left on their own to find housing opportunities, either alone or with a roommate. Evenings were spent making late night-copies for their classrooms at 24-hour copy centers, and having to find a parking space when they came home, often blocks away from their residences. Teachers came home after a long day in the classroom feeling overwhelmed by the experience and having no other teachers to turn to for support.

Miller's Court and Union Mill were developed specifically to meet the needs of these teachers, and teachers were an important part of the design team. They expressed over and over again that this living environment should be well located, attractive and functional. It should provide amenities within the building (e.g., planning rooms,

technology hubs, fitness center, “hanging out” space, a cafe) and in the immediate neighborhood. As a result, there would be built-in intellectual and emotional support within this like-minded community. As one Miller’s Court resident says:

As the school year becomes busier and harder, I find the help that I need is literally steps away. If I need a late-night copy there is no need for a late-night run to the 24-hour print shop. I also found great friendships and laughter in socializing with other young teachers. We laugh as we talk about our classrooms and bring each other back when we have one foot out of the door.

Collaborative, Cost-effective Office Space can Enhance Nonprofits’ Effectiveness

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Studying the nonprofit organizations interested in the Centers for Educational Excellence concept, the Seawall team learned that, after personnel, rent was their highest operating expense. Organizations were paying for space that they did not need on a daily basis, such as conference rooms, training facilities, lunchrooms and event accommodations.

The Centers for Educational Excellence model allows

nonprofits the opportunity to develop their offices efficiently based on their workflow. Each nonprofit tenant pays rent on only the square footage they need to run their organization on a daily basis. The Center provides additional amenities to nonprofits at no cost: conference rooms, training facilities, secure parking, a fitness center with locker rooms and showers, a common kitchen and break room, and a beautiful center courtyard to host outdoor meetings and fundraisers. These free resources generate savings that are redirected to programs

Jeffrey Zwillenberg, who chose Union Mill for his New Leaders organization office, indicates:

We were able to significantly reduce our office footprint — thus reducing our costs. Through the shared amenities, we actually increased our facilities and conveniences.

The Center model also encourages collaboration between and among nonprofits housed in the same building. Organizations can easily engage in joint strategic planning initiatives, leveraging their own and each other's assets in the interest of the students and teachers they serve. Several such initiatives have resulted in joint funding, and models are being prepared that demonstrate the positive student outcomes resulting when these organizations work together in the schools. The Center also organizes more formal learning opportunities and opportunities for collaboration. These include brown-bag lunches featuring guest speakers that bring staffs from various

organizations together in an environment that fosters connections. Jessica Kohlen Karaska, leader of Playworks, says of her organization's office at Miller's Court,

Surrounded by other organizations committed to helping make our city better, we can harness each other's strengths and talents, collaborate, and share.

Teach for America and the other education-focused nonprofits housed at Miller's Court and Union Mill have confirmed that being part of the project has significantly lowered their operating costs, increased their collaboration with each other, increased employee morale, and enabled them to more effectively recruit staff and retain teachers. The Seawall team fully expects similar positive results for the Oxford Mills project in Philadelphia.

Centers for Educational Excellence Help Spur Neighborhood Revitalization

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Both of Baltimore's Centers for Educational Excellence have helped to catalyze redevelopment in their neighborhoods. At Miller's Court, the Seawall team carried out historic rehabilitation and brownfield reclamation of a former tin-box manufacturing plant. At Union Mill, the

team similarly reclaimed a cotton-duck mill that had been sitting vacant. The neighborhood is now experiencing a burst of residential growth, particularly among young professionals seeking affordable housing.

The Centers were built sustainably: Miller's Court achieved LEED-Gold certification, while Union Mill was developed under The Baltimore City Green Building Standards. Miller's Court has received national awards, including the Urban Land Institute's Jack Kemp Workforce Housing Models of Excellence Award and the Environmental Protection Agencies Smart Growth Award.

Conclusion: the Centers Model will be Replicated in Other American Cities

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The Centers concept can and should be explored in every major urban center in the country. With public school systems hiring hundreds of new teachers each year, a significant portion of them recruited nationally, there is a built-in demand for workforce housing for new teachers. This school year alone, Teach for America has more than 8,200 first- and second-year corps members working in 40 regions and touching the lives of 500,000 students in low-income communities. Last year, more than 40,000 applicants applied for 4,500 Teach for America positions across the country.

TFA recognizes the value of the Centers concept and has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Seawall Development Company to replicate the Centers for Educational Excellence model across the country. Philadelphia, along with Washington, D.C. and New Orleans, is a TFA-identified growth area, and TFA has committed to being the lead commercial tenant in these developments, with their corps members making up the majority of residential tenants.

Seawall redevelops functionally-obsolescent, generally long-vacant, historical buildings into mixed-use projects. These projects provide amenity-rich, convenient, affordable housing for teachers and cost-effective, efficient, and collaborative office space for non-profit organizations. (The Seawall model is known now as the Center for Educational Excellence.) To date, the company has completed or is developing over \$100,000,000 in historic adaptive-reuse projects. For more information, contact Donald Manekin at dmanekin@seawalldevelopment.com or 410.207.9993. For more information about Miller's Court, please visit www.millerscourt.com. For more information about Union Mill, please visit www.theunionmill.com.

D3 Real Estate Development is a mission driven real estate development company founded by civic-minded partners with a solid track record of

successful projects throughout Philadelphia. The firm focuses on developing modern, high-quality residential and mixed-use developments and assisting nonprofit organizations with their real estate and development needs. In addition to co-developing Oxford Lofts, D3 is currently developing three modern townhouse projects (Fairmount Court, The Nine and Norris Square), managing the development of a new theater, restaurant and headquarters for the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival & Philly Fringe, and overseeing the expansion and relocation of Children's Crisis Treatment Center's corporate headquarters. The partners have also recently completed Memphis Flats, The Ayer Condominium and Old City 108. For more information, contact Gabe Canuso at gcanuso@d3developers.com or 610.453.8121.