

# City Neighbors Foundation



## The Decade Report

## IF YOU COULD HAVE THE BEST SCHOOL YOU CAN IMAGINE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?



Mike Chalupa  
and Bobbi Macdonald

**TOGETHER WE WILL  
CONTINUE ON THE  
PATH TOWARD OUR  
IDEALS OF PROGRESSIVE  
EDUCATION: SEEING  
CHILDREN, TEACHERS  
AND FAMILIES AS  
POWERFUL, CREATIVE,  
LOVING, UNIQUE AND  
DESERVING OF THE  
DEEPEST RESPECT.**

Dear City Neighbors,

Congratulations on the 10 Year Anniversary for City Neighbors! The Decade Report illustrates City Neighbors School's history with a selection of stories and documents, photos and memories that chronicle our journey of opening, our work these past ten years and who we are today. We began 10 years ago with this question: *If you could have The Best School You Can Imagine, what would it be?*

City Neighbors began when 17 families started a grassroots effort to take on the school system—and won the battle, against all odds. We fought for the right to open, we lifted a proposed cap on charters and we fought to get a funding formula for charter schools. During the founding years we stayed focused on the mission of City Neighbors, and we learned to recognize what was on the path of City Neighbors and what was not. We learned what it takes to change policy, build relationships and do the difficult and joyful work of imagining City Neighbors—together.

Our stand for teaching and learning in the past 10 years, here in Baltimore, is worth celebrating. We have not just taken a stand; we have thrived! Our approach to teaching, learning and governance is founded strongly on seeing children as powerful, capable, creative, compassionate and with an inherent human need to be known, loved, and inspired. Our school is dedicated to Project Based Learning, Arts Integration, a Reggio Emilia inspiration and our unique governance model based on a theory of distributed leadership and family engagement. Our stand for teachers is to make sure they are at the center of curriculum development and remain co-creators of our schools.

In 2015, we turn 10. Where are we ten years later? We have proven what can be done to create a thriving public school. Our results are strong and there is so much evidence of our success. We serve over 800 students and have over 1,000 students waiting to get into our school each year. We have recruited and retained strong faculties. Our families dedicate over 10,000 hours a year to our schools. We are building a Foundation that is impacting public education through partnerships, events, and as a model. And we are becoming nationally known for the stand we have taken and work of our students and teachers. All of this (and so much more) in just ten years!

Many people have worked together to create "The Best School We Can Imagine." We are humbled by the educators, students, parents and community folks who have come together to create. Their talents, skills, dreams and ideals are more than we could have ever created or imagined ourselves. Together, we will use this amazingly strong foundation to launch into the next decade and beyond as we continue to imagine, create and strive.

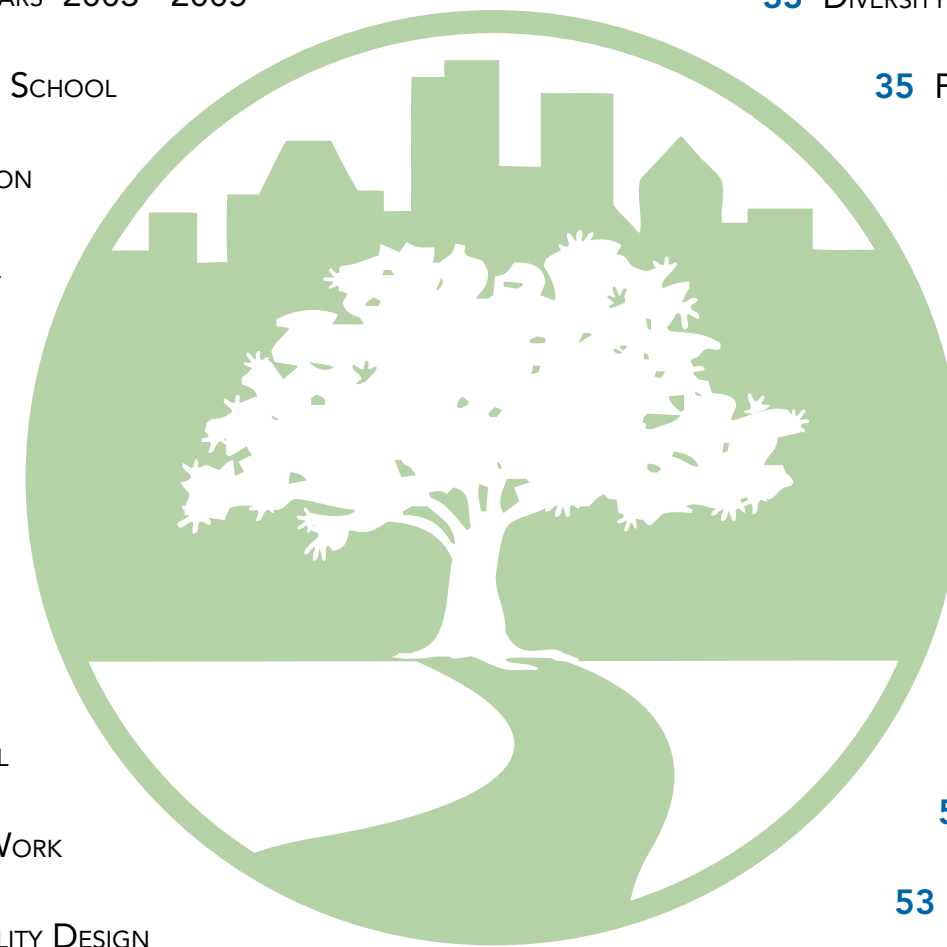
We hope you will enjoy this publication and the stories, the captured moments and the voices in it. We thank you for being a part of the first decade of City Neighbors. Let's keep going together!

*Bobbi and Mike, July 2015*



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## THE FIGHT FOR CITY NEIGHBORS: HOW 17 FAMILIES FOUNDED

### “THE BEST SCHOOL WE CAN IMAGINE”

On the day Maryland passed the Charter School Law, Baltimore City Schools faced a \$52 million deficit, declining enrollment, a strong culture of standardized testing, and racially and economically isolated schools. Unhappy with the state of the public schools, and faced with the injustice of the public school system delivering an education that was not designed to enlighten or empower children and teachers, our founders were inspired to start a school based on the ideals of progressive education. And so, the story of City Neighbors really begins when a group of neighbors got together in this city. There were six people at that first meeting. All of these neighbors had young children, and that night they created a list of what they wanted to see in the school of their dreams. Some of these qualities were:

- High academic standards
- We want kids to love school and be curious
- Exceptional
- Parent involvement
- Creativity
- Special needs
- Safe environment
- Nontraditional classroom

#### The Challenges of Founding a Charter School

From that night forward they continued meeting every month and found there were many people who wanted to gather and create an ideal public school. And the folks who came every month went from being a room full of people to being the founders of City Neighbors.

The Founders faced some daunting challenges and came to rely on certain phrases to keep them inspired—“Creating the Best School We Can

Imagine,” “Let’s create a school that will be here 100 years from now,” and, from the Reggio Emilia schools of Italy, “Nothing Without Joy.” As they began to figure out what work needed to be done, committees were formed to tackle that work. First, they needed to put their vision in writing and submit the Charter School Application.

They formed a Governance Committee that created bylaws and designed a board structure for distributed leadership. Each Governance Committee meeting began by reading the mission statement aloud.

The Marketing Committee created the name of the school and selected the school colors of blue and orange. They also created the school slogan, *Inspired to Create*, as well as the school logo—a graceful path (The Way) leading to a tree (Learning and Life) against the city skyline (Our Community).

The Hiring Committee placed ads with online education career boards, drawing applications for faculty positions from all over the country and Europe.

There were late nights of email correspondence—sharing ideas, thoughts and wonderings. On the last Thursday of every month, the Founders met to report, work, think and share good food. At these meetings—and the many meetings in-between—there would often be 7-10 children under the age of ten present, sitting on laps, asking for snacks and rolling in and out of the house and yard. Sometimes, one family would babysit while the rest of the Founders met elsewhere.



## FINDING A HOME



The Facilities Committee launched the work of finding a suitable facility to serve the small school model. They conducted assessments at three sites and created a chart of comparisons. At a key meeting in the office of Bob Embry, President of the Abell Foundation, they reviewed the choices together. Bob asked Aisha Isackson, Chair of the Facilities Committee, "Which one do you think is best?" Aisha looked down at the paper thoughtfully and replied, "Epiphany Lutheran Church is in a residential neighborhood, and they will be good partners with us for many years. They are the best choice."

The Founders approached Epiphany Lutheran Church with a formal presentation to the Church Council, where they were met, understandably, with some surprise, skepticism and resistance to change. It was suggested that there be a series of meetings allowing parishioners to learn about the idea of City Neighbors, and what having a school in their facility could mean for the church, the community and certainly for the students.



It was at this crucial time that a handful of influential supporters emerged. Champions, including Pastor Keith Hardy, and church board members such as Carl and Edna Rau, Kent and Linda Gruz, Mr. Charlie and others, understood the need to shake up the thinking about the use of the space. Over time, the congregation opened their hearts and hallways to City Neighbors. In a congregational vote in February 2003, Epiphany Lutheran Church agreed to enter into partnership with City Neighbors, and the Abell Foundation donated the very first \$800 to help fund an environmental assessment of the building and the church matched that gift. The congregation generously donated \$50,000 to City Neighbors from the Colehower Fund. It was the first major gift to City Neighbors.

The process for getting the facility ready for opening day began. This included clearing out rooms, like the candle making room, the woodshop, the room called Snug Harbor and the old print shop in the basement, where calendars hung dating back to 1939. Church members and Founders worked together—cleaning, sorting and remembering the great history of the church. In the midst of this clearing and cleaning process, the church recovered a lost stein that they then sold at a Sotheby's Auction for \$42,000. We began to create a new future for the building and our communities together.

The Church made a commitment to the children of City Neighbors by signing a 15- year lease for \$1.00 per year. Each year, the President of Student Council pays the annual rent to the pastor. City Neighbors remains deeply grateful for their partnership with Epiphany Lutheran Church.



## TAKING ON THE DISTRICT



Bernadette Naquin and Bobbi Macdonald dropping off the original charter at the school board on Founders Day, March 15, 2004

### The Founders shared their vision for the school with the school board.

On March 15, 2004, now known at our schools as Founders Day, the Founders walked down the halls of the Baltimore City public school district headquarters, known locally as "North Avenue." They handed over the city's first charter school application. And the wait began.

Though the Charter School Law required that City Schools respond to charter applications within 120 days, the deadline came and went. The Founders wrote, called and stopped by the district many times. Several Founders presented to the City School Board, State School Board and City Council, but could not get anyone to acknowledge that the application was being read or considered.

Charter schools were new in Maryland, and Baltimore City Schools was in the midst of turmoil with a \$52 million deficit, as well as a rapid turnover of CEOs. They were not ready for City Neighbors. The Founders even wrote a charter school folk song to the CEO of the school system, asking to be approved. The song aired on National Public Radio, but their cries fell on deaf ears.

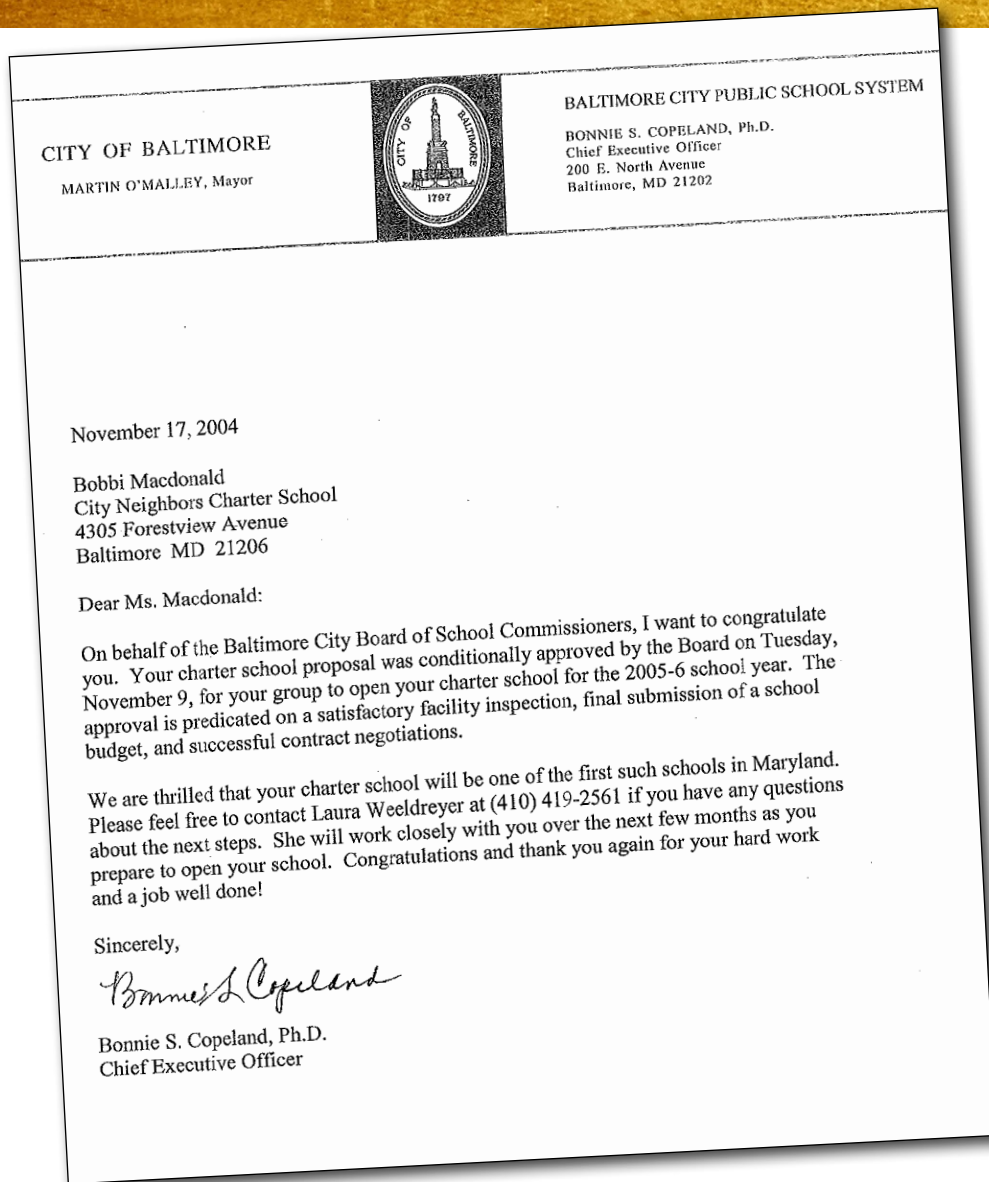
There came a night when the Founders had to reluctantly admit defeat for the goal of opening in 2004. A few families left the effort when they had to find other schools for their children. Despite the setback, those who remained never wavered in their belief that they could do it.

In response to the delay, the Advocacy Committee created a strategy to introduce the members of the school board to the idea of City Neighbors. Members of the Baltimore City School Board were invited to the site where City Neighbors hoped to open its doors. The Founders shared their vision for the school with the school board and they made a direct appeal to them to review the application.

Now the Founders set their sights on opening September 6, 2005.



Sadie Macdonald handing out daisies to the Baltimore City School Board on the occasion of our approval



## ADVOCACY

### The Cap

Working pro bono with the local law firm of DLA Piper, the Founders engaged attorney, Will DuBois, who appealed to the Maryland State Board of Education for the City Neighbors application to be considered and to fight the District proposed cap that limited the number of charters to only three schools over three years. The State Board lifted the cap in 2003 and ruled that City Schools must respond to the City Neighbors application.

On November 9, 2004, the District granted “conditional” approval of City Neighbors to open in September 2005. The Board of City Neighbors chose to ignore the conditional part of the approval and went forward with their plans to open the school.

### Fundraising

The City Neighbors community held its first annual silent auction. The committee planned a beautiful night that transformed Hightman Hall, the gathering space in the church, into a city park with a reflecting pool, park benches and charming streetlights. Because the school was not yet open, there weren't any parents to attend or student artwork to display, which would be hallmarks of the event in subsequent years. The silent auction was run with donated items contributed by the community, Founders and church members. It was a night when, once again, the City Neighbors community proved to itself that they could reach their goals together.

### The Battle for Fair Funding

During the early years, the District could not determine the funding model for charters. Independently run public schools were new in Maryland. As the funding dispute with the District could not be solved, City Neighbors—along with Patterson Park Public Charter School, Southwest Baltimore

Charter School, Inner Harbor East Public Charter School and Northwood Appold Charter School—sought a Declaratory Ruling from the Maryland State Board of Education. Once again, they engaged Mr. Will Dubois who put in hundreds of pro bono hours on behalf of City Neighbors that helped pave the way for a Statewide Funding model. On July 3, 2007, the Court of Appeals affirmed the State Board's decision, and Will became the youngest winner of the Maryland Pro Bono Resource Center Pro Bono Service Award for his work on this case.

### The Coalition

In 2004, City Neighbors called the first meeting of the Coalition of Charter Schools at Café Hon, bringing together folks from across the city who believe in public education. The Coalition became a strong voice for protecting the autonomy of charter schools, and today serves as the main liaison with the District as well as a statewide advocacy organization.

### A Broadening Mission

Through the struggle for getting approval, lifting the cap and establishing a funding model, the charter community became galvanized. The grassroots nature of City Neighbors created a unique stance and, as a result, they became known as change agents, dedicated to their students, to the ideals of public education and to joyful participation in the city of Baltimore.

### Building Toward Opening Day

From June 2004 to August 2005, the Founders were in a constant state of activity. The Fundraising Committee created the school's first budget for the charter application. In addition to the \$50,000 from Epiphany Lutheran Church, City Neighbors received \$20,000 from the Lockhart Vaughan Foundation, a \$450,000 construction loan with a guarantee from the Abell Foundation and a federal startup grant of \$450,000.

While the Founders negotiated the charter contract with the District, the Hiring Committee interviewed faculty and selected those who shared their vision of the child. The Founders designed a plan for registration and enrollment and ran the school's first citywide enrollment lottery.

### A Vision for a Progressive Urban Public School

City Neighbors Charter School was founded on the ideals of progressive education—seeing children as capable, creative, loving and deserving of the deepest respect. The Founders worked together to make the school building and classrooms reflect these beliefs.

As construction continued, the physical space of City Neighbors evolved into a prominent and distinctive feature. The learning space was designed to communicate a deep care for students and teachers. Together, the Founders cleaned, painted, bought furniture and rugs—everything they could think of to make a comfortable, beautiful and loving space for students and teachers.

### Founding Faculty

The founding faculty was composed of a school leader, Roberta Mantione from Colorado, and ten teachers and staff: Shané Bennett, Susan Brightman, Carolyn Burlin, Peter French, Adam Goode, Paige Isackson, Monica O'Gara, Eric Rasmussen and Amanda Shorter, with April Crosby as Office Coordinator.

A dedicated group of parents, gathered together to answer the question, "If we could have the Best School You Could Imagine, what would it be?" The founders of City Neighbors Charter School worked tirelessly over the course of two years to develop, plan and open our school. Faced with challenges that included developing an educational model, finding and renovating a physical space and filling that space with teachers, students and families—all while challenging a school district that did not want to entertain the idea of a charter school—these founders were unwavering in their efforts. The seventeen founding families of City Neighbors Charter School were pioneers, not only for our schools, but for charter schools throughout Baltimore.



Founders: Jennifer and Tony Bedon • Nick and Tracey Bonomo • LaTisha Bourelly • Sue and Leo Fothergill • Emily and Charlie Gatewood • Kate Gehr and Fred Edwards • Aisha and Dan Isackson • Shellae Jones • Robyne Lyles • Rob and Bobbi Macdonald • Bernadette and Jack Naquin • Rob Noble • Kim and Rodney Poindexter • Mark and Ava Schweikert • Cindy Grim and Barb Stratton • Dorothy Valakos and Scott Larson • Jessica Whitfield

CITY NEIGHBORS LOGO DEVELOPMENT



Idea 1: Who is this gigantic boy and why is he stuck in a tree?



Idea 2: This "sun people" logo might work better for a skateboarding shop.



Idea 3: If you need help finding us, we're in Northeast Baltimore...but what are we all about?



Idea 4: Suggests that we're arts integrated... close....so close...



FINAL: Now we're talking! The path, tree and skyline say it all!

**BERNADETTE NAQUIN, Founding Parent**  
City Neighbors Charter School

When the work for creating City Neighbors Charter School was in its infancy, the group that eventually would become "the Founders" would meet at Bobbi and Rob Macdonald's house monthly. Each meeting grew larger as interest grew in the community.

At one of the meetings, we were discussing the need to establish 501(c)3 status to become a non-profit organization, at the cost of about \$500. Every month we would pass around the hat, and folks would give what they could. We had a long way to go, this group of parents. Sometimes we felt a little discouraged.

At the January meeting, one of the parents, Cheryl Radke, brought with her an empty Kleenex box with cut-out kittens glued to each side. "Now we really need everyone to put some money in the kitty!" We had maybe \$200 in the kitty at that time.

That was the night that Ava and Mark Schweikert said that it had been a good Christmas for them. Their parents had given them "a box of money" and they wanted to donate it all toward the cost of applying for the non-profit status. Our goal was met. The paperwork was filed shortly thereafter and City Neighbors Charter School became official, laying the foundation for next ten years—and beyond!

# WELCOME TO OPENING DAY!



On September 6, 2005 after a two-year battle with the District to get the charter accepted, achieve a fair funding model and overcome other obstacles, City Neighbors opened its doors to 120 students from Kindergarten to 5th Grade. What a celebration it was! Standing outside of the school, surrounded by balloons, the music teacher played Dixieland tunes on the trumpet. And, beginning a tradition that has been reenacted every opening day since, each child was handed a wildflower as they entered the school building.



All of the families came in for an opening ceremony, that included a welcome from the Board President, speeches by students and comments by City Schools CEO, Bonnie Copeland and City Council Delegate Keiffer Mitchell. State Delegate Cheryl Glenn, School Board Member David Stone, Maryland State Department of Education Representative Pat Crain and Maryland Charter School Network President Joni Berman were among the friends and officials present.



Pastor Hardy from Epiphany Lutheran Church was on hand to ceremoniously receive the school's annual rent payment of \$1. A large red ribbon was cut and the students entered the building. And as they made their way to classrooms, they passed through a canopy of handwritten wishes and hopes fluttering from silky ribbons, created by parents, teachers and community members.

*Opening Day on September 6, 2005 is where the founding story comes to an end and the story of City Neighbors Charter School begins.*

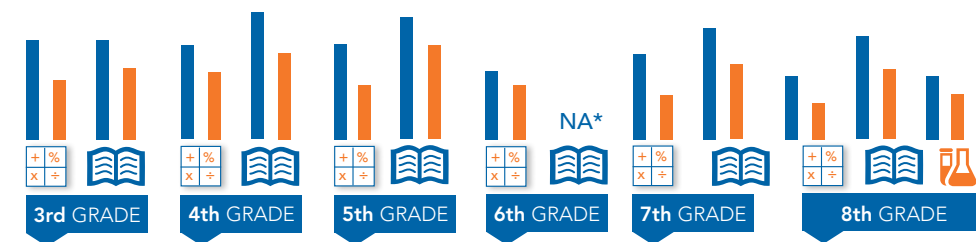






City Neighbors Charter School, the founding City Neighbors school, opened with 120 students in grades K-5 in the Fall of 2005 and is now celebrating its 10th Anniversary. City Neighbors Charter School now serves 216 students in grades K-8, and has graduated six classes of eighth graders. With two full contract renewals, test scores that far surpass the city and often the state averages, a well-established project-based, arts integrated, workshop model of teaching and learning and a parent body that has contributed over 60,000 hours to the school in its first ten years, City Neighbors Charter School enters its second decade as one of the premier K-8 schools in Baltimore.

2014 CNCS MSA Scores



Key  
 CNCS Scores (Blue bar)  
 City Schools Scores (Orange bar)  
 Math (Math icon), Reading (Reading icon), Science (Science icon)

\* Students piloted PARCC test



MONICA O'GARA, Teacher  
 City Neighbors Charter School

To be in charge of a first-grade class is to be a daily witness to a small community, or a large family of six- and seven-year-olds. When some adults look into my classroom, they may see distinctions: who is African-American, who is Caucasian, who is both, whose parents went to college, whose parents went right to work.

Six-year-olds make distinctions, too, but they are of another kind. They know who loves to be first in line and who loves to be at the end. They know who can add and subtract—without fingers. They know who loves reading the *Biscuit* series and who loves *Henry and Mudge*. They know who has already turned seven and who will be turning seven in fifteen days. They don't seem to think too much about race and class.

Then January comes and it is time for us to learn about Dr. Martin Luther King. I am mindful that soon we will be part of the All School celebrating his life and work, so I use a storybook about Dr. King's life that first tells about his growing-up years, his family and schooling.

Then we come to the part about segregation. How to explain to young children that, in the not-too-distant-past, laws did not always protect but were sometimes hurtful and wrong, so good people had to work to change them? Every year, when we come to the drawing of separate drinking fountains, there is a collective gasp of shock. And, every year, when I read about how children of different races were not allowed to go to school together, they spontaneously reach out for each other and sit holding hands through the rest of the story. It happens every year.

This little family of six- and seven-year-olds is a bit unsettled for a few days, sometimes a few weeks. But then they seem to realize that is not their experience. And they return to thinking about those other distinctions: who knows the tooth fairy is not real and who knows the tooth fairy definitely is real, who can help you tie your shoelaces and who will get stuck on the loopy part. And, most importantly of all, who will help when you spill your lunchbox—and not even ask for a bite of cookie in payment. You know, the important things.



Opening its doors in the Fall of 2009, with grades Kindergarten through 3rd grade, City Neighbors Hamilton has now grown to a full K-8 school and will graduate its first class in June 2015. Nestled in the heart of Hamilton and sharing a campus with City Neighbors High School, City Neighbors Hamilton has a waitlist nearing 500 students and serves as a model site for its progressive education practices, parent-school governance and physical environment.



**JASON LEE, Parent and Board Member  
City Neighbors Hamilton**

With a four-year-old soon entering Kindergarten, our choices were the underperforming neighborhood public schools or the expensive private or parochial schools. But we discovered another option. In Baltimore, we have some great charter schools, and from what I was hearing, City Neighbors Charter School was one of the best.

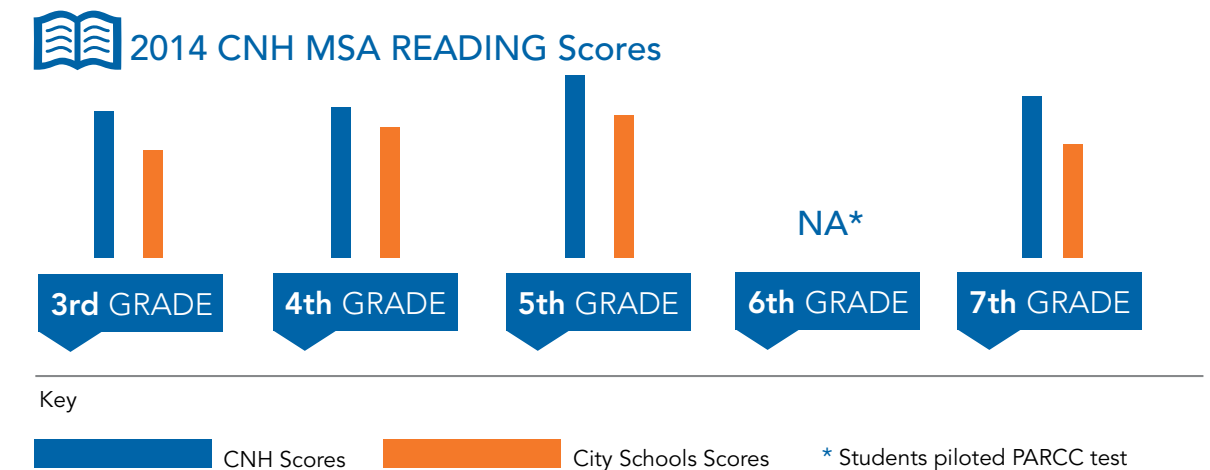
Much like what was detailed in the film, *Waiting for Superman*, we entered the lottery for both City Neighbors Charter School and the new City Neighbors Hamilton, which was opening that school year.

We did not “win” in the initial lottery drawing, but after the first week of school, our number on the waitlist was called. My son acclimated easily, as he had some friends in his class, and the format for the Kindergarten was such that the kids easily learned and followed “The City Neighbors Way.”

After the first parent meetings and school events, I felt like there was something different and exciting about to happen at CNH. The light really changed when I was asked by the Board to participate in a hiring search and had the opportunity to spend time with Executive Director, Bobbi Macdonald and some of the CNH faculty.

I began to see that City Neighbors was about the holistic development of children and not just creating test-taking machines. I began to attend the Friday All Schools and met more parents who were also excited about the school and that’s where the strength of City Neighbors really began to show itself to me.

I saw a school not only energized by the kids, but by the parents and community, as well. This energy has developed over the years and has spread to other schools and communities. As a parent, and now as Board member, I am proud to be part of the City Neighbors family.





Opening in 2010 with just 9th grade, City Neighbors High School graduated its first class of seniors in the Spring of 2014. Designed based on this question, "What would it take for every student to be Known, Loved, and Inspired?," City Neighbors High School has become a model of high school education for its unique pod structure, its physical environment and its stand for student and teacher empowerment. City Neighbors High School serves almost 400 students, with hundreds of students on the waitlist each year.

**SEAN MARTIN, Teacher**  
City Neighbors High School

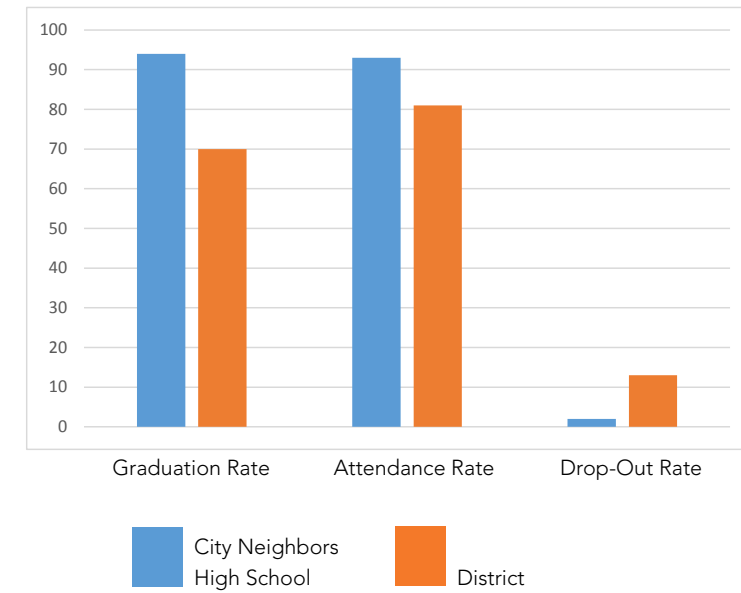
In the early blush of May, a few award-winning authors agreed to come in and meet with us. Students chose an author they thought they'd like to meet. Then, for a few days before the authors arrived, we split into groups to read and talk about their books.

Jaida, an inquisitive 11th grader, chose Geoffrey Becker's short story collection *Black Elvis*. It was the most advanced work of the lot, a stretch for many students because it isn't about kids at all. It's about adults, and fumbling ones, catching us at our most confused and discomposed.

On reading days, Jaida would sit up straight, a copy of Becker's book open surreptitiously in her lap. One day I noticed a furtive smile begin to curl the corners of her lips. Her eyes sparkled.

She called me to her, then she said, deadly serious, "I used to think adults were older. They knew everything. Now I realize they're just like us. Like teenagers." We shared a knowing laugh. She looked from me to the book, from the book to me, as if she were really seeing me, the adult that I am, for the very first time.

Comparison to the District



**THE PUPILS' PUPILS by Danique Dolly, CNHS Founding Principal**

Graduation day...  
Was more like the first day than the last  
Forced to remember such meetings of the past  
Like when I first saw the mystery faces that  
belonged to the first class' names  
From community meeting to our One Voice  
We offered them a different choice better  
than living out "the Wire"  
We offered them the choice to pursue their desires  
To go beyond and aspire..as we Inspire to Create  
I remember day one discussing the graduation date  
I remember willing my most deliberate speech,  
hoping they'd relate  
I remember young ones holding wild flowers  
looking at me with hope  
Holding on to my every word because every  
word defined their journey  
My first speech left the bright eyed pupils quiet  
Contemplating what would be  
From day one I realized I had a beautiful burden

With 90 kids following me...  
93% attended school and they don't go away  
94% graduated on that Saturn day in May  
This principal who graduated in '95 knew  
there would be that day  
When the first day would lead to the last  
And what would I say?  
And so the young ones with wild flowers  
Now donned white gowns and held roses  
Excitement lingered in the air with many pics,  
selfies and poses  
Morgan State auditorium was packed  
There was nothing that this day lacked  
I looked at Bobbi, she looked at me  
We led the way and did not look back  
As we hit the stage and took our seats  
All I could see was a sea of white gowns  
Streaming down with touches of blue  
Heads held high with Pomp and Circumstance  
And then it hit me...this was my last chance

My last words, my last time  
That I'd see them all together  
While celebrating the mountain we climbed  
But when I stood to deliver my speech  
Most the crowd I did not see  
Outside of bright eyes of my students staring at me  
Like they did on day one, year two and year three  
To the end of year four, they're babies no more  
Mature graduates now at the fore,  
Sitting front and center in the crowd  
Confident, poised and much more proud  
Standing up and speaking there wasn't much I could do  
But admire the view and appreciate all that we  
went through  
Looking deep into their eyes, lost in their hue  
Of browns, hazels and even some blue  
Graduation day was again like day one  
The circle...now made whole.  
Looking into my pupils' pupils  
With eyes as windows to their souls...



Teachers are the heart of City Neighbors. Our schools are designed to be places where teachers are not only respected, but they are honored as experts in their crafts as curriculum developers, relationship builders, assessors of student progress and policymakers for our classrooms and schools. Within our mission and vision, teachers are encouraged to develop great pedagogical practice, but they also serve on the Board of Directors, participate in the hiring of all new teachers, work together to develop policies and structures, design their evaluation tools and so much more. At City Neighbors, we strive to be a place where talented, strong teachers feel nurtured and valued.

### Our Teachers: 2014-2015 Stats



Over  
**100**  
teachers and  
staff across all  
three schools



Average teacher  
retention:

**93%**

#### KATE SEIDL, Teacher City Neighbors Charter School

“Nine years ago, I left the Midwest and came to Baltimore to continue to pursue what I had sought throughout my career: sustainable quality progressive education within the public school system. Coming to City Neighbors was like crossing a bridge and entering home territory at the same time.

The home territory I found upon arrival at City Neighbors included passionate teachers and curious students. A foundational base, it turned out, because the teachers cared so deeply about creating a school that looked like all of their dreams. And the families and children chimed in with their own dreams.

The swirl of dreamers and workers—and, believe me, it took a lot of work—took shape. So, together, we tried to figure out how to create the best possible school. That meant looking to each other, and to others in the field, and trying and experimenting, day by day, week by week, year by year.

Ten years have passed quickly, all of us still striving, finding success and satisfaction. But not the kind of satisfaction where we sit back and feel the work is complete. Instead, the ideals we hold as a community and the visible progress we are making toward them—toward sustainable quality progressive education—push us to refine, tweak, connect and all those other verbs, that mean we are, simultaneously, crossing new bridges and homesteading.

Professional Development Approach



City Neighbors approaches teacher professional development growth in a three-pronged way.



Professional Development Activities Include:

- Book Love: Developing Depth, Stamina, and Passion in Adolescent Readers, Penny Kittle, Philadelphia
- Bank Street, New York City
- Maryland Artist/Teacher Institute, College Park
- National Association of Art Educators, Baltimore
- Project Zero, Harvard University, Cambridge
- National Teachers of Mathematics Conference, Baltimore and Richmond
- National Science Teachers Conference, Philadelphia
- Open Earth Society, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore
- Towson University, Baltimore
- Reading/Writing Project, Teachers College, New York City
- NAEYC Conference, Chicago and Orlando
- National Charter Schools Conference, Chicago
- National Charter School Conferences, New Orleans
- High Tech High, San Diego
- Summer Literacy Institute, Lesley University, Boston
- Coalition of Essential Schools Conference, Providence
- AERO Conference, Portland, Oregon
- Visionary Arts Museum, Baltimore
- National English Teachers Conference, Washington, D.C.
- Expeditionary Learning Conference, Baltimore
- STEM Conference, Howard University, Washington, D.C.
- Cyert Center Visitation, Pittsburgh
- Project Zero Perspectives and SASIE, Memphis
- Council for Exceptional Children Conference, San Diego



Project-Based Learning anchors our approach to teaching and learning at our City Neighbors schools. With compelling questions guiding our work, weeks and months for in-depth research in and out of the classroom, and authentic ways to show our learning and make a difference in the world, Project-Based Learning drives us to think and work more critically, more informatively, more globally, more creatively, and more powerfully.

**NADIYAH HERRERA, Teacher**  
City Neighbors Hamilton

In the spring of 2014, my second-grade students created original Eric Carle-inspired books. These books incorporated the water cycle, dialogue, problem and solution, descriptive language, researchable facts and collage artwork inspired by Eric Carle. Despite the many components of the books, I was truly confident that my students could do this. I became their biggest cheerleader by encouraging their efforts all the way. We had regular check-ins where we discussed our progress. We celebrated their progress every step of the way.

During this experience, the students shared control of this project with me. Students were allowed to make this book their own. I created the conditions and background knowledge needed through mini lessons, research, demonstrations and modeling, but it was their creativity, tenacity and enthusiasm that made this project possible. These students did not just meet my expectations—they exceeded them. Each of my 22 students completed an original book that was amazing and unique.

I do not doubt my students' capacity for learning, even though a standardized test could never measure the success that my students demonstrated by completing this project. I trust in their ability to discover new ways to demonstrate their brilliance. I am truly thankful for having the opportunity to experience such powerful learning and to continue creating bigger educational dreams for each of my students.



Project Questions Over the Years



SPEAK UP OR STAY SILENT?

Can MY Story Change History?

Is Peace Possible?

What is a Hero?

Am I An American?

What is Our Legacy?

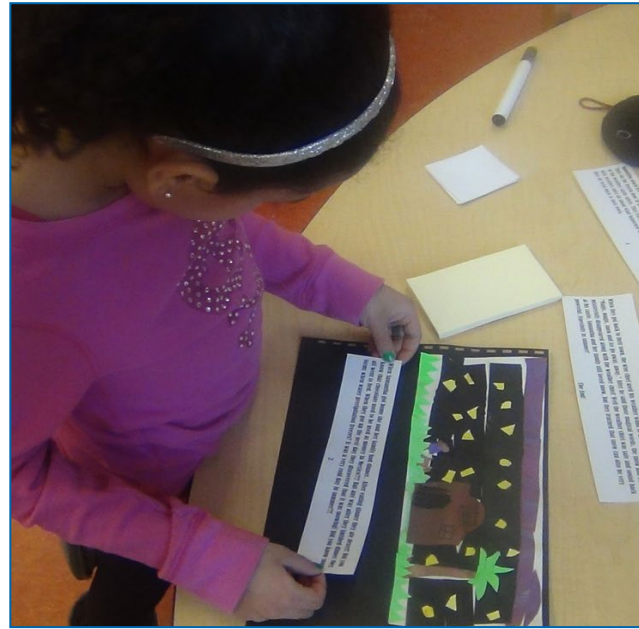
DO KIDS HAVE RIGHTS?



What Makes News News?

WHAT MAKES US HUMAN?

- Should We Close Read's Drugstore?
- How Do You Deal with Difference?
- What is an Ideal School?
- Why Can't We Swim in the Inner Harbor?
- Are Aliens Real?
- Can We Create Enough Electricity to Charge a Cell Phone?
- Can We Save Smith Island?
- How Can We Design Our Classroom?
- Can a Zoo Be a Good Place for an Animal?
- Why Didn't Our Garden Grow?
- Does It Matter Where It Happens?
- Is All the World Really a Stage?
- How Can Argument Change History?
- What Does Biology Sound Like?
- Are Zombies Real?
- What Can a Teenager Do?
- Can Teenagers Fall in Love?
- What's the Matter with Our Food?
- What Does Gender Mean in Our Society?
- What Does it Mean to be Civil?
- Does History Matter?
- Will the Chesapeake be Swimmable and Fishable by 2020?
- Who are the Grown-Ups at School?
- What Can Live in our Classroom Tank?
- What Does it Take to Open a Restaurant?
- Who Deserves a Monument?
- Can Art Change the World?
- What are Bones?
- How DO I Think?



At City Neighbors schools, the arts are an essential component to teaching and learning. Through poetry, music, movement, visual arts, puppetry, drama and almost any other imaginable art form, our students gain a deeper, more complex and nuanced understanding of reading, social studies, science and math while having multiple ways to express their learning. The deep integration and infusion of the arts in our school not only strengthens academic understanding and performance but nurtures the creativity, expression, hearts and minds of the students in our schools.



**ALISHA MARCHEWKA, Atelierista  
City Neighbors High School**

The first arts-integrated project that made the magic happen at CNHS was a project about immigration that I developed along with U.S. History teacher, Kris Sieloff. We created a wall-sized Basquiat-inspired collaborative mural of the United States, each piece representing a different cultural group of immigrants. Through this piece, I saw all of my roles come together. My time with students as their art teacher was apparent in the quality of the work they created, the connection between the arts and social studies was strong, co-teaching was invigorating and my relationship with my Pod students gave me insight on to how to work with them academically.

But something I didn't expect also happened. I became the student. I saw the children as my teachers, each with something different to teach me about learning. I learned to let go of some of my preconceived expectations, and allow students to direct their own work. The innovations in painting that occurred when students felt empowered to experiment was inspiring. Since that project in 2010, I have spent my time every year trying to create that same magic with arts integration. We are all teachers and students at CNHS, and the arts help us to see that every day.

Arts Integration Examples Over the Years

- Creating Soundscapes to Study Literary Mood**
- Fiber Arts to Study Digestive System**
- Human Sculpture to Understand Historical Events**
- Dance and Geometry**
- Movement and Square Numbers**
- Quilting and Pattern**
- Architecture and Geometry**
- Visual Arts and Scientific Data**
- Dance and the Rock Cycle**
- Puppetry and the Moon**
- The Blues and Literature**
- Shadow Dance and Music**
- Clay and Biography**
- Collage and Weather**
- Film and Storytelling**
- Puppetry and Endangered Animals**
- Sketching and Classification**
- Visual Arts and Persuasion**
- Dramatic Interpretation and Square Root**
- Puppetry and U.S. History**
- The Blues and Patterns**
- Music for Addition and Subtraction**
- Watercolor for Geography**
- Doll Making and History**
- Cut Paper Collage and Landforms**
- Kinetic Sculptures and Motion**
- Calligraphy and Writing**
- Lithography and Analysis**
- Cut Paper Art and World War II**
- Ink Printing and the 1920s**
- Clay and Historical Figures**
- Music and the Water Cycle**
- Movement and Photosynthesis**
- Altered Books and Audience**
- Rap Music and Government**
- Fashion Design and Chemistry**
- Spoken Word and Politics**
- Photography and Essay Writing**
- Drama and Summaries**
- Screenprinting and Fables**
- Puppetry and the Atom**
- Mural Making and Immigration**
- Poetry and Spanish Verbs**
- Sculpture and Cells**
- Collage and Dante's Inferno**
- Drama and Character Development**

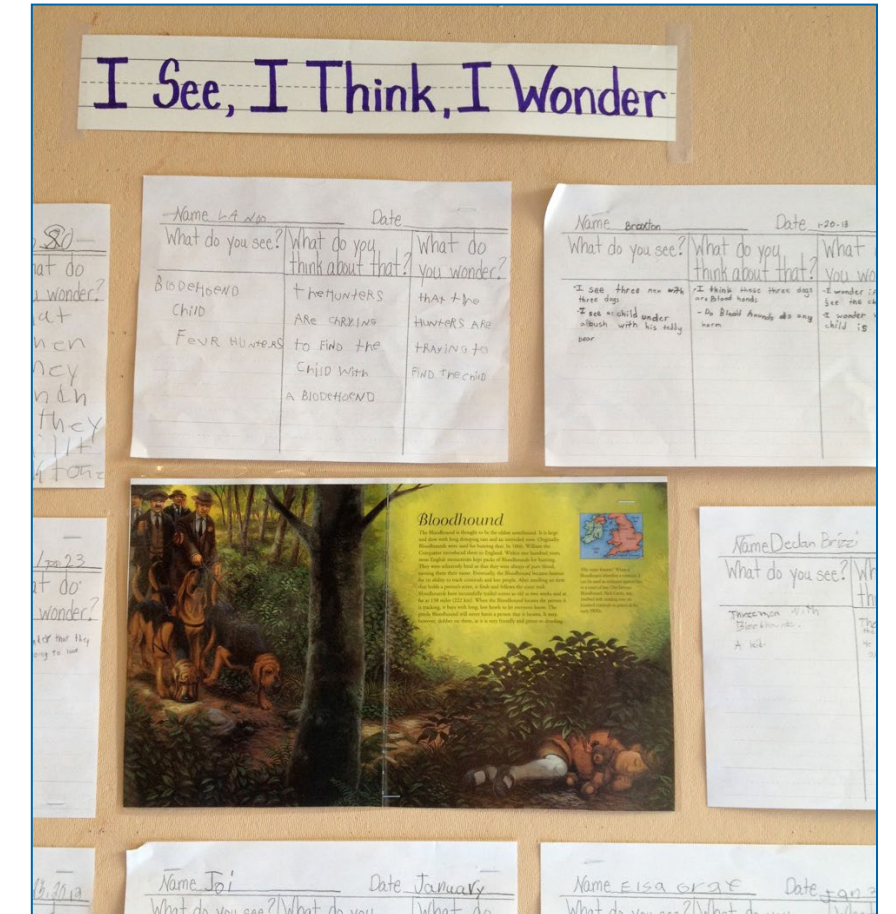
Reggio Emilia is the name given to an approach to education that evolved in the Northern Italian municipality of Reggio Emilia. Our City Neighbors schools are inspired by the vision of Reggio Emilia, its view of the child, and its practice. We are inspired in the following ways: the belief that children are strong, intellectually rich, and have countless ways to learn and express themselves (described as "The Hundred Languages of Children"); a commitment to deep in-depth studies; a commitment to the close observation of the child and thoughtful documentation of their work; careful attention to the physical environment and its contribution to the child and his/her learning; the infusion of learning opportunities directed by student interests; and a structure that supports children being educated in a strong community environment. Our Reggio inspiration can be seen everywhere from Kindergarten through 12th grade.

**MARILYN MULLEN, Teacher**  
City Neighbors Hamilton

Ms. Marilyn: "So, this is a sketch of what I was thinking..."  
 Darryl: "Yeah! We can make this wooden part a tree."  
 Cassidy: "This part can be the roots."  
 Darryl: "Then we can make each level of the rainforest. This can be the forest floor, and this the understory. Right here can be all the animals living in the canopy and the top can be the emergent layer."  
 Ms. Marilyn: "I love that idea! If this is where we put the animals, maybe we can put the reports you are writing over here."  
 Darryl: "Yeah, but the animals can be hanging in the hallway off the tree."  
 Cassidy: "It's like the City Neighbors tree! Maybe we can do a dance in the hallway in front of the tree as our animals."  
 Cassidy starts gorilla walking down the hallway.  
 Darryl: "The scarlet macaw can go here and we can label the animals and write who made each animal. Jamen's tree frog can go here because it lives in the canopy..."  
 Cassidy: "We could hang Anna's green anaconda from the ceiling!"  
 Darryl (wide-eyed and jumping up and down):  
 "Can we start right now?!"



We are inspired in . . . the belief that children are strong, intellectually rich, and have countless ways to learn and express themselves . . .





"[During] every Pod time and One Voice, I have reflected on how unique this experience is and cherished the time I have had to think and learn for myself...Pod has also been a positive growth factor in our high school experience; the members of each *have become a family* on their own time through good and bad experiences. The time in that one room each day has provided great support for keeping up with what we have to do in a comfortable way. Having a *caring guide to help us stay connected* has also been very helpful...

— Devon Snyder, CNHS graduate

As an anchor piece to having our students be "Known, Loved, and Inspired," beginning in 9th grade, each student belongs to a pod through their four years at CNHS.

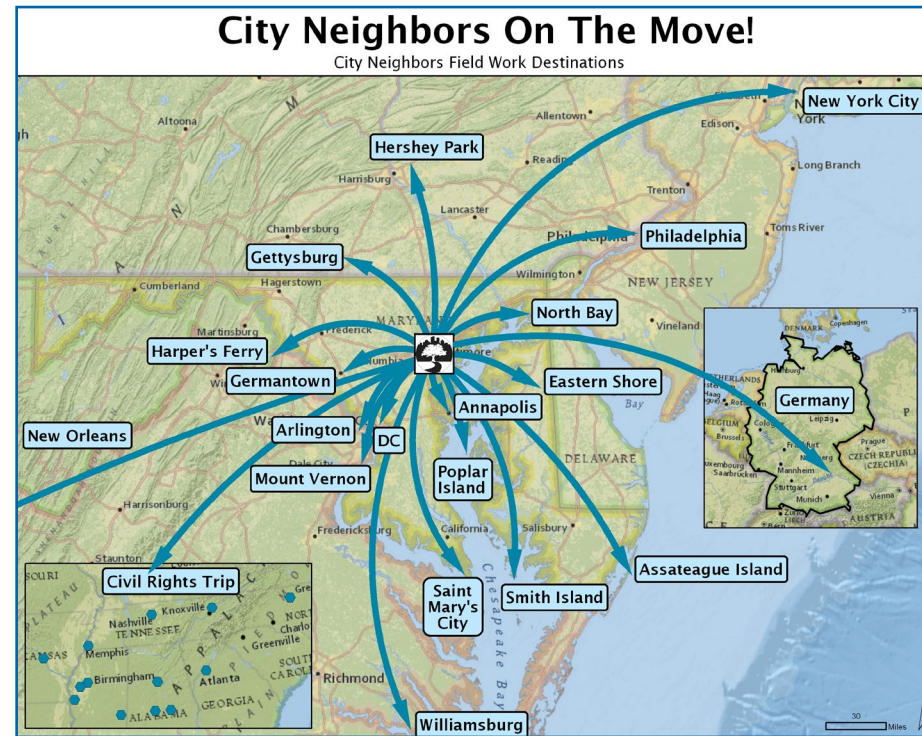
A pod is a group of fifteen or sixteen students who meet and work daily for an extended period of time. These pods, led by a teacher (a pod leader), are provided with their own space that includes a studio/workspace for each member and a common meeting space.

During workshop time, students in pods are asked to work on their independent projects, complete coursework or participate in small support or enrichment activities. Pod helps students build family, plan and support each other with work, learn how to prioritize and focus during independent work, and serves as in-depth advisory model.

On graduation day, after four years together, each student is presented their diploma by their pod leader and graduate together as one interconnected group.



Field work is real life learning. As students and teachers seek experiences to broaden their visions and understandings of our world, they set out—off campus—to learn. City Neighbors students have traveled to Philadelphia, Maryland’s Eastern Shore and Gettysburg. They participated in the 50th Anniversary March in Washington, D.C., traveled the American South on a Civil Rights trip, stood on the docks of Ellis Island, investigated the impact of water for a week in New Orleans and flew across the Atlantic Ocean for a yearly student exchange in Leipzig, Germany, to name only a few. This out-of-the-classroom learning is not a benefit or a perk—it is integral to growing our understanding and self-awareness of being an important, connected part of our world.



**PETER FRENCH, Teacher**  
City Neighbors Charter School

According to David FitzSimons—the only German speaking individual on that first eighth-grade trip to Germany six years ago—the travel time on the train from Berlin to Leipzig was forty-eight minutes. Given our anxiety, forty-eight hours would have been preferable.

Once all of us chaperones ensured that all the kids found their seats, I settled into mine and pulled my journal and pen out of my backpack. I stared out the window at the panorama of streets, buildings and bridges that weren't that different from American cities. I wrote that the differences were in the details: the people, their language and food, and above all else, their history.

We'd just completed three days in Berlin, the beginning of an eight-day adventure. Much of our time was spent simply wandering, testing our limited language skills and experimenting with local food. On the second day, we caught a train and traveled north to Orianienburg. We walked twenty minutes from the station to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. What I saw and experienced there, in the company of these children, will remain in the marrow of my bones for the rest of my life.

This train proceeded on to Leipzig where we'd made arrangements to stay with the families of students from a local middle school. That was our hope. I was about to put the fate of these twelve- and thirteen-year-olds in the hands of strangers. From the beginning, I'd been faking a calm demeanor, but I wasn't sure I could sustain it. With my journal in my lap, I attempted to use my pen as a therapeutic instrument to cope with my nervous tension.

The kids were unusually quiet as the train approached the station. That was one slow walk down the train platform. Our contact, Isa, said she'd meet us. What if she wasn't here? The crowd of passengers eventually thinned and there, at the end of the platform, was a throng of grinning parents and children, holding a huge banner whose words immediately calmed all our hearts. It read, "Welcome Friends from Baltimore."



With the support of foundations, banks and individuals, City Neighbors began with one school in the educational building of Epiphany Lutheran Church on Raspe Avenue serving 216 students. Working with our partners we invested to bring the building up to code and make it a beautiful space for learning. In 2009, we grew into a two campus organization with the expansion to the nearby Hamilton Campus on Sefton Avenue, home of our second and third schools serving over 600 students. Rooted in the strong belief that the environment is the third teacher, the physical design and maintenance of the physical environment serves as a key design element of City Neighbors schools. With hallways designed to reframe hallway culture, classrooms that include both working and comfortable spaces, walls that reflect student work, an infusion of glass to support ideas of transparency and connectedness and furniture that communicates individuality, sturdiness and care, the physical environment helps to redefine the ideas of school, teaching, learning and community.

Comfort and Inspiration

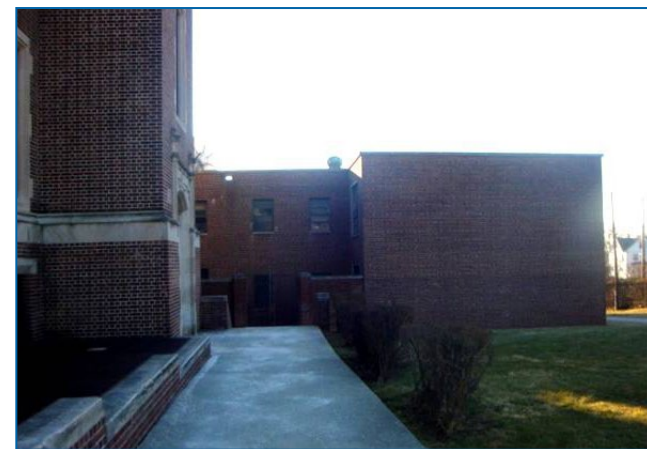


City Neighbors Charter School  
3rd Floor: Before



City Neighbors Charter School  
3rd Floor: After

Welcoming Community Spaces



City Neighbors Hamilton  
Entrance: Before



City Neighbors Hamilton  
Entrance: After

Transparency and Trust



City Neighbors High School Hallway: Before



City Neighbors High School Hallway: After

Beauty and Joy



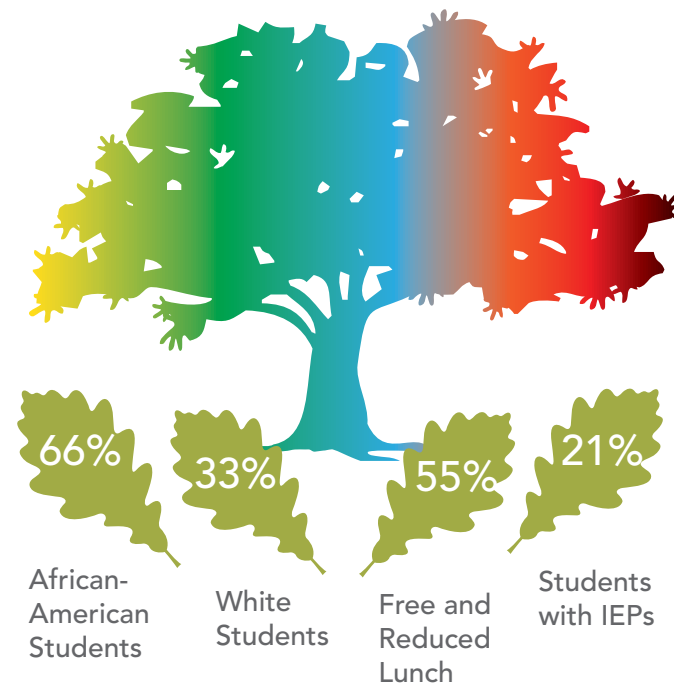
City Neighbors High School Cafeteria: Before



City Neighbors High School Café: After

Our students benefit from diversity in all forms: a healthy representation of black and white students, diverse family structures, students with learning challenges and those without, students and families at all levels of the socioeconomic spectrum and a wide variety of religious and life beliefs. City Neighbors schools are rooted in a powerful diversity statement that was created by parents, teachers and students, and we are proud to be among the most diverse schools in Baltimore City and in the region.

Our Diversity: All Three Schools



Diversity Statement

Diversity is essential to who we are!

*In this spirit, City Neighbors embraces the diversity within our school, community, and world. We endeavor to create an environment that values all people of any ability, age, family structure, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status.*

*We strive to create this through our curriculum, interactions, staffing, policies and procedures.*

*As the families, staff, and students of City Neighbors, we accept the responsibility to help every member of our school feel safe, respected and valued.*

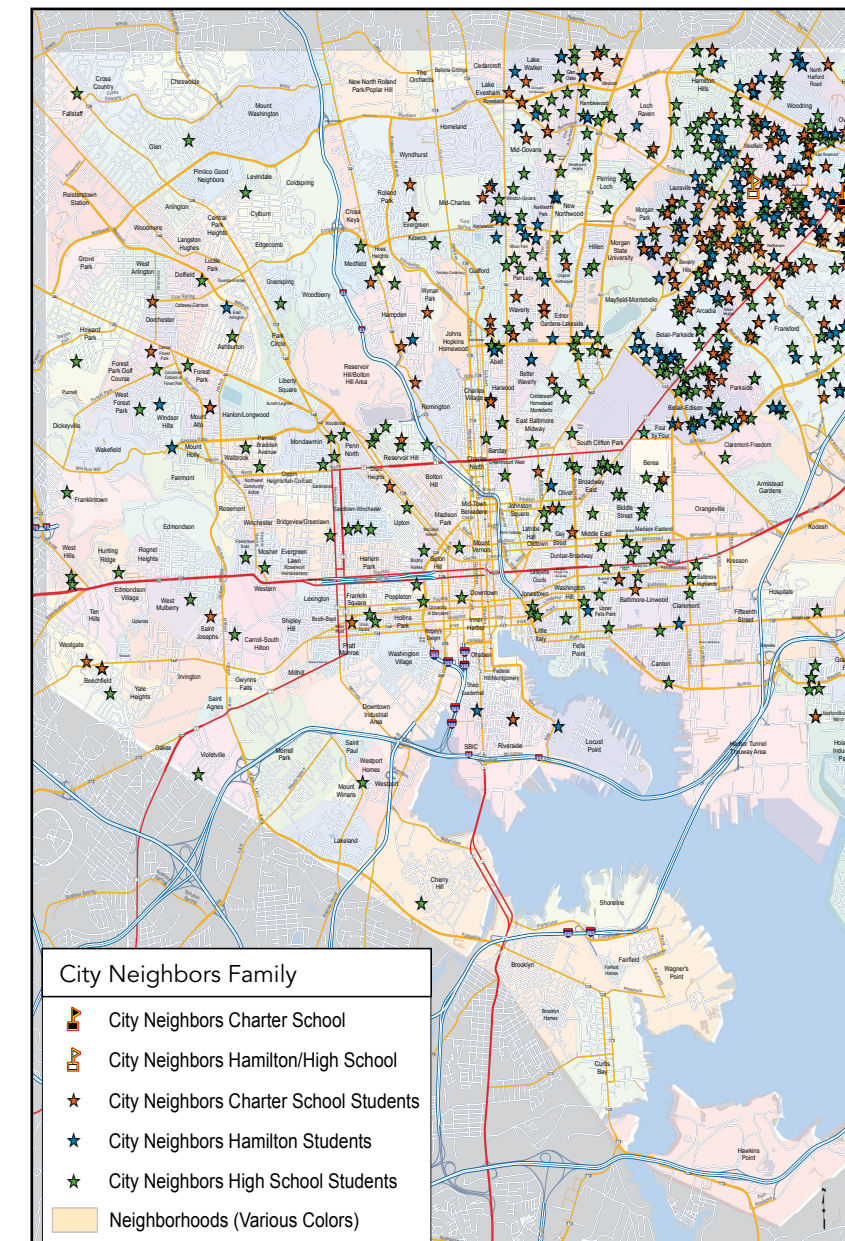


ERIKA COUGHLIN, Parent City Neighbors Hamilton

Amara is a celebrity, or at least she thinks she is. Her freckly face and infectious smile are easily recognizable. She walks down the hall waving to classmates as if she is in a parade, getting hugs along the way. No matter the age or size, Amara has love to give to all of her fellow students at City Neighbors Hamilton. Looking at her smile, you would never know the struggles she has faced. Countless hospitalizations and surgeries have made it, at times, difficult for Amara to attend school, making it all the more special to her when she is there. She loves school and enjoys being included in activities.

When Amara was a baby, we were advised to write a vision statement for her, to help us always stay focused on what we want for her and guide to her success. Like all parents, we want our child to live a happy and productive life where she can take care of herself and live as she chooses. Because Amara happens to have a disability, adults like to tell us frequently all the things that Amara can't do, won't do, will never do. We understand that there may be limitations for Amara but low expectations will only hinder her abilities. At past schools, we have had to fight for Amara to be included with her peers. We explained our dreams and hopes to blank faces and puzzled looks. At City Neighbors, we feel welcomed to share our hopes and feel that our vision for including Amara is valued.

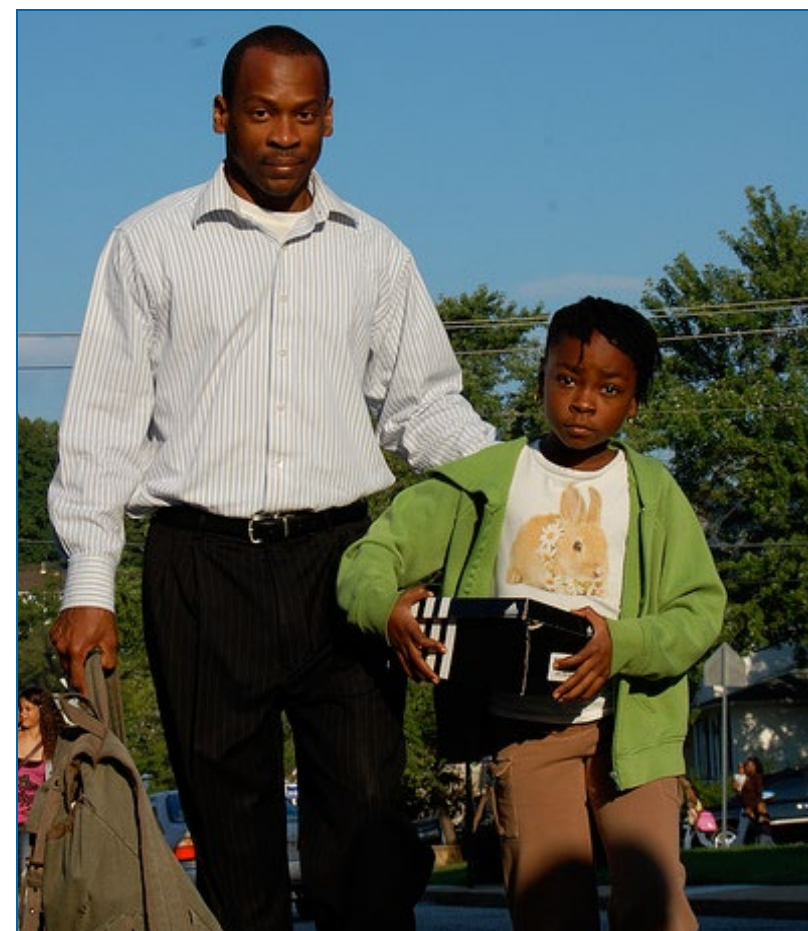
We love the City Neighbors community. We forged great friendships even before school began. Through the arts at school, we have watched Amara's confidence grow. Amara was too shy to participate in "All School" the first time her class was called upon to present. By the end of the year, Amara was able to participate and dance with her classmates on stage. This development of her confidence and newly found interest in dramatic arts helped Amara to recently participate in a public service announcement commercial for the office of Special Education. And who knows? Maybe one day an acting career!



The City Neighbors model is built on the belief that when parents and teachers are in strong partnership around the child and around the life of the school, the impact on student learning is powerful and long-lasting. We strive for a parent-school cooperative model that asks parents to be co-creators of the school and to take on essential work of the school in partnership with staff and the principal. At our K-8 schools, this partnership takes three forms:

- We expect every family to dedicate forty hours a year to the school in some capacity.
- We ask every parent and staff member to work with each other in a collaborative way that assumes the best intentions of each other.
- We ask our parents to serve on committees and share the responsibility of governing City Neighbors as Board members.

**Volunteer Hours**  
**87,643** Volunteer hours given by  
**City Neighbors families**  
**over the past 10 years**



**SHELLAE JONES, Founding Parent & Board Member**  
 City Neighbors Charter School

“One of my fondest memories at City Neighbors was our very first International Potluck dinner. The idea began with a discussion at a Community Relations Committee meeting, when one parent started talking about all of the different ethnicities represented in the CNCS family. We wanted to come up with an event that celebrated each individual and allowed them to share their unique culture with the rest of the school family. And so the planning began. Once we put out the call, families enthusiastically signed up to bring food, desserts and even provide entertainment. We had no idea that this event would be as big as it was—with over 200 participants. It was such a success that it became an annual event. Nothing brings family together like food, music, games and fun.”

**KARL MCKINNEY, Parent & Board Member**  
 City Neighbors Charter School

“In 2002, my wife Kellie and I moved our family to Baltimore City from Chicago. We home-schooled our children but were exhausted and could not replicate the home-schooling experience we had known with friends in Chicago. We made new friends in Baltimore, including Rodney and Kim Poindexter and their three children. In 2004, when we were looking around for other educational alternatives, Kim told Kellie about a new charter school being planned in our neighborhood. As soon as enrollment opened, we submitted applications for three of our children: Gabriel, Mollie, and James.”

Kellie and I took turns volunteering at the school. We enjoyed making friends, working on the building, planning and participating in meetings, ferrying our children and the children of other parents to and from our homes and field trips. I was honored to work on the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, as well as serve on the Board. “Neighbors” is an intentional noun in our school’s name. I have a deep appreciation for the neighborliness that City Neighbors Charter School has built among children, parents and faculty.”





Board of City Neighbors Charter School

Each City Neighbors school is managed by a Board of Directors. The unique and powerful governance model of each City Neighbors school creates a collaborative governance model where each member of the Board has a working and productive role, and are working together with the community to create our school.

The Keystone Arch is the visual image of our governance model. The parents, staff, students and community are the foundation for the Board. Every Board position is designed to support the Principal, who then supports the teachers, who are in direct contact with our children every day.

*Always, with every decision, we ask, "What is best for the students of City Neighbors?"*



Board of City Neighbors Hamilton

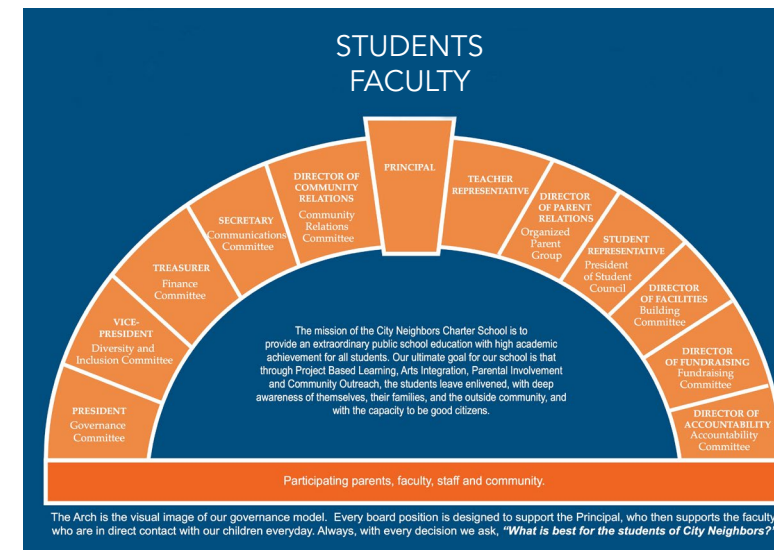


Board of City Neighbors High School

### The City Neighbors Legendary Governance Arch

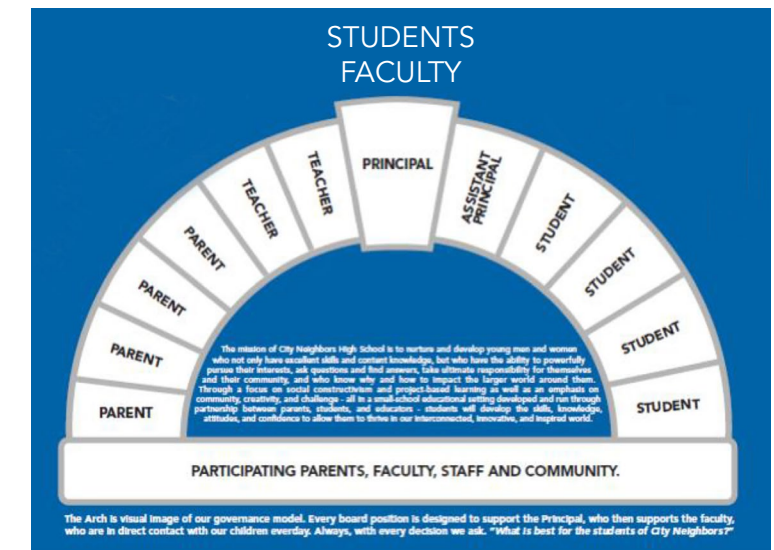
The keystone arch is a visual representation of our governance model. Each stone represents a position on the board. In the keystone of the arch is the principal, who directly supports our teachers and students. The idea of the arch is that every position is important, interconnected and necessary.

The CNCS and CNH Governance Arch



Each Board member chairs a committee. Each of those committees generate culture, relationships and work that is designed to involve more parents to create our schools together.

The CNHS Governance Arch



The High School Arch has four students, four parents, four faculty/staff. Students are elected by their peers.

### School Board Stats: All Three Schools Over Ten Years

8 BOARD PRESIDENTS

96 PARENTS SERVING ON BOARD

18 ELECTIONS HELD

229 BOARD MEETINGS HELD

At each City Neighbors school, students select representatives to a Student Council. The Student Council works with a faculty advisor to consider the needs, hopes and wants of the student body and to take action. At all three schools, the Student Council is represented with full voting rights on each school's Board of Directors. The students of City Neighbors help to co-create our schools.



**SOME STUDENT COUNCIL INITIATIVES:** Public Awareness Campaigns • Campaign for Updated Technology • Peer to Peer Tutoring • Campaign for Healthy School Lunches • Fundraising Field Trips • Valentine's Day Fundraiser • Advocacy in Annapolis

Over the past ten years, City Neighbors schools have created and developed a strong set of traditions and events which anchors its people, its story and its rhythm of life. These traditions and events have emerged from each school community. Whether it's each student in every school receiving a wildflower to add to others in a community vase on the first day of school, or City Neighbors Charter School's International Potluck and End-of-Year Picnic, or City Neighbors Hamilton's Spring Fling and Winter Arts Festival, or City Neighbors High School's Talent Show and Graduation Ceremony, each school is developing those traditions that bring their students, families, and teachers together to celebrate being part of the City Neighbors community.

### TRADITIONS BY THE NUMBERS:

230 Graduates • 21 Opening Days •  
4,103 Wildflowers Given • 21 Winter Arts Festivals



### SOOZ LAUGEN, Internship Coordinator City Neighbors High School

It is 4:30 a.m. on the first day of school when my alarm goes off. I have to be ready for Bobbi Macdonald to pick me up in just thirty minutes. It is still dark when she pulls up and I leave my house, coffee in hand. "It reminds me of when I was a kid and used to go fishing with my dad," Bobbi says. "It was just me and him, and it was still dark out, it was so early." This is the fifth year I have taken this trip. This is the tenth trip for Bobbi.

Around 5:15 a.m., we enter a huge wholesale floral warehouse and head for the walk-in refrigerators. We choose an assortment of flowers and pile them onto rolling carts—sunflowers, daisies, mums, irises—too many varieties to list. The tradition began ten years ago at City Neighbors Charter School. Each student is given a single wildflower on the morning of the first day of school. They then take that flower to their classroom where they place it into a vase along with every other student's flower, creating a beautiful bouquet, symbolizing the beauty of each individual student and the collective beauty they create as a group. We started with 120 flowers that first year; now, with three City Neighbors schools, we need more than 800.

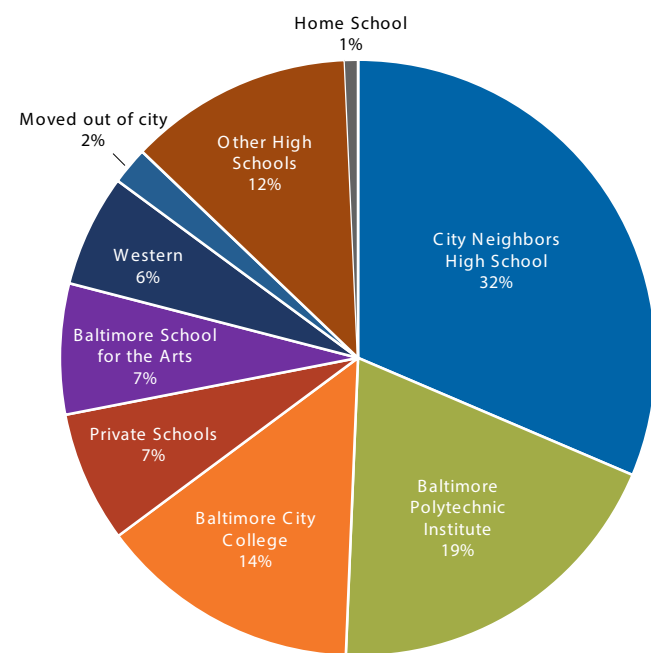
This yearly trip has become special to me. It reminds me, every year, of what makes City Neighbors unique.

OUR GRADUATES

Our first 8th grade class at City Neighbors Charter School graduated in June of 2008. Our first 12th grade class at City Neighbors High School graduated in May of 2014. And, this year, our first 8th grade class will graduate from City Neighbors Hamilton. Our 8th grade graduates leave us and join the best high schools in Baltimore—public and private. And our first 8th grade graduates are now sophomores in college.

At CNHS, 100% of our graduating seniors left with either a college acceptance or post-educational plan. To date, we have over 200 graduates from the City Neighbors community. Aligned with our mission, our students "leave enlivened, with deep awareness of themselves, their families and the outside community, and with the capacity to be good citizens."

8th Grade Graduate High School Choices



BRIAN N. MATTHEW, Class of 2014  
City Neighbors High School

One of my most memorable experiences at City Neighbors High School took place during my 9th grade year. The school year was quickly coming to a close and the City Neighbors family and I had a dilemma. The problem that occurred was that my mom wanted to transfer me out of City Neighbors to another school. What's so significant about this experience is that the members of my City Neighbors family stood up for me and believed in me. On May 31, 2014, I graduated from City Neighbors High school with some pretty honorable credentials. I had been my class president for three years, I sat on the City Neighbors High School Board with my peers, and numerous other things. One of the most important lessons I learned while attending City Neighbors was to never give up on yourself. There are plenty of kids throughout Baltimore City whose parents gave up on them. I believe that every student should be able to attend a school like City Neighbors, where even if you give up on yourself, the staff of City Neighbors High School WON'T give up on you.

BOB CULLEN, Parent  
City Neighbors Charter School and  
City Neighbors High School

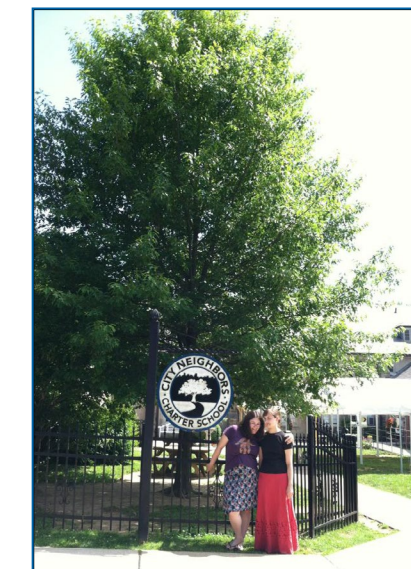
My sons Frankie (Class of 2011) and Luke (Class of 2012) attended City Neighbors Charter School (CNCS) starting with the first year that it opened. With both of my sons now thriving in their respective Baltimore public high schools—Frankie at City Neighbors High School, Luke at City College—my wife Mary and I can attest to how CNCS helped prepare them for their continued educational development.

I want to focus now on Frankie's CNCS experience. As a special-needs student, Frankie arrived at CNCS with plenty of untapped potential waiting to be explored and appreciated by him and others. After a somewhat rocky start during that fledgling year, Frankie's overall journey as a CNCS student turned out to be rewarding and enriching. He wasn't just a student at CNCS, he was student of CNCS, and that made all the difference.

CNCS did a lot to empower Frankie and allow him to better appreciate the world both within and around him. His years in the school's academically challenging but supportive environment energized him to more fully pursue his talents, especially his two great passions of reading and writing, and to not just survive but thrive in high school.

Frankie's biggest benefit from CNCS, however, was summarized best by him. When asked what he liked best about his years on Raspe Avenue, Frankie replied, "My friends." Long after we have all moved on, CNCS will remain a vibrant, caring, inclusive community where miracles of learning take place each and every day.

One Founder Reflects After Her  
Youngest Child Graduates  
by Emily Gatewood



"I was speaking to some other founders of City Neighbors Charter School the other day and what came to mind most when thinking of the school was the CNCS tree behind the girls in this picture. It was picked out by a landscaper friend of mine and planted by co-founder Tracey

Bonomo. The tree grew as the school grew and as the kids grew. I looked at it for the last time as a CNCS parent yesterday and couldn't believe its size, strength and beauty. It holds its own now, is independent and provides a symbol of strength and also cooling shade. Goodbye CNCS tree, may you grow stronger and bigger and provide strength and shade for many children to come. The tree is truly a symbol of this great community. Goodbye CNCS! We will miss you!"



City Neighbors has benefitted from many strong partnerships in our growth and evolution. We consider our partners to be any people or organizations who have directly supported us, who have partnered with us in a common endeavor, or who strive for a like-minded vision of what schools can be. We are grateful to the over fifteen Baltimore foundations who have invested in us, the eight institutions of higher learning who have partnered with us, the over twenty organizations who have lent their services to support our growth, programs and development, and the community organizations and individuals who have contributed in innumerable ways.

*"Having visited countless schools in Baltimore City over the past 20 years, I have seen a wide variety of schools. What sets City Neighbors apart is a learning environment that empowers students to seek their own learning."*

— SHYLA RAO

**SHYLA RAO, Co-Director and Instructor, Master of Arts in Teaching Program, Maryland Institute College of Art**

For many years, City Neighbors Charter School has been the most coveted internship placement for the graduate students in my MA in Teaching class at Maryland Institute College of Art. Every fall, MICA sends a group of interns to City Neighbors to collaborate on creating an arts-integrated unit for their students. And every year, our students end the internship asking the same question, "Do you think they will have an opening for an art teacher next year?" After experiencing City Neighbors, they cannot imagine teaching anywhere else.

A few years ago, I asked Mike Chalupa, the Principal of CNCS, to talk with my Curriculum Design students about progressive education and the design of City Neighbors Charter School. Instead of merely talking about the school, he asked questions, engaged students with a small group activity and opened the floor for discussion. Mike described ways of being that are fostered in the school, how curriculum was emergent and responsive to student needs and interests, and why he believed that progressive approaches to learning develop deep engagement with learning.

I had always observed the students at CN from the sidelines, until I was approached by their Atelierista, Susan Brightman. Her students were interested in India, and she asked if I knew someone who could show her students the process of mehndi (henna tattoos). I had recently gotten married and had followed my Indian traditions of full mehndi designs on my hands for the ceremony. It was a perfect match! The day I arrived with henna, lemon juice and sugar was the day I personally experienced a part of the magic of City Neighbors. The students were curious, engaged, enthusiastic and openly made connections with previous projects and content they were learning. They embodied the ideals Mike had described to my class just a few weeks prior. Having visited countless schools in Baltimore City over the past 20 years, I have seen a wide variety of schools. What sets CN apart is a learning environment that empowers students to seek their own learning. A year and a half later, while observing a MICA student teacher at CNCS, a few students saw me and exclaimed, "Hey! You're the henna lady!" And the henna lady was happy.


A Decade of Working with the Community



Maryland Institute College of Art • Towson University • Loyola University • University of Maryland, College Park • Goucher University • University of Baltimore • UMBC • Morgan State University • Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (Orch Kids) • Blue Water Baltimore • Center Stage • Baltimore Education Coalition • Community Conferencing Center • Enoch Pratt Free Library • Hamilton Arts Collective • Hamilton-Lauraville Main Street • HARBEL • Leipzig School 16 • MD Humanities Council • National Coalition of Diverse Charter Schools • National Network of Schools in Partnership • National Endowment for the Arts • Northeast Schools Alliance • Single Carrot Theatre • Teach for America • Young Audiences of Maryland

We are grateful for the generosity of the many people, foundations and organizations who have given to City Neighbors. Beginning with our first grant of \$800 from the Abell Foundation in 2004, the foundations in Baltimore have invested in us, helped us when we needed it and encouraged us to grow and expand our work.

Over these past ten years, we have financed over \$12 million with the support of great organizations like Hamilton Bank, The Reinvestment Fund and M & T Bank. And our own City Neighbors families, through the Fundraising Committee, have raised more than \$250,000 to support our programs and operations. In return, we have kept strong in our stand for children, our focus on our mission, vision and ideal for public education in Baltimore.



**SUCCESSFUL CAPITAL CAMPAIGN**

In 2005, CNCS conducted a successful Capital Campaign to raise \$300,000 to install the elevator needed for ADA compliance on the founding campus.

In the early days of City Neighbors, a great challenge we faced was making the founding school building ADA compliant. The France-Merrick Foundation gift of \$200,000 as a matching grant helped us to implement a successful capital campaign that expanded our donor base and allowed us to reach our goal of raising \$300,000 to install the elevator on Raspe Avenue. Thank you to Mr. Robert W. Schaefer, then Executive Director of the France-Merrick Foundation for his encouragement, support and advice.

Thank you to the Joseph and Harvey Meyerhoff Family Charitable Funds for their generous gift of \$60,000 and for their unwavering investment and support of City Neighbors.

We would also like to thank all the teachers, families, corporations and neighbors for their generosity in giving to the campaign and invite them to take a ride in our beautiful elevator anytime. Going Up!

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS 2004 – 2014



CNHS students thank Buffy Minkin of the Joseph and Harvey Meyerhoff Family Charitable Funds



CNHS students thank Bob Embry and Bonnie Legro of the Abell Foundation

<p><b>\$400,000 and up</b> Joseph and Harvey Meyerhoff Family Charitable Funds</p> <p><b>\$200,000 and up</b> Abell Foundation France-Merrick Foundation</p> <p><b>\$100,000 and up</b> Baltimore City Council The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation Goldsmith Family Foundation</p> <p><b>\$60,000 and up</b> Goldseker Foundation Baltimore Community Foundation Lockhart Vaughan Foundation</p> <p><b>\$40,000 and up</b> Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation Aaron Straus and Lillie Straus Foundation Epiphany Lutheran Church Wright Family Foundation</p>	<p><b>\$10,000 and up</b> Aber D. Unger Annie E. Casey Foundation Hamilton Bank Healthy Neighborhoods UPD Consulting Anonymous</p> <p><b>\$5,000 and up</b> William G. Baker Memorial Fund FM Harvey Foundation Laurlene Straughan Pratt Foundation The Zanyvl and Isabelle Krieger Fund Neighborhood Design Center Open Society Institute M&amp;T Bank</p> <p><b>\$1,000 and up</b> H.U. Dove and Company The Reinvestment Fund Harbel T.R. Klein Home Depot Foundation Maryland Humanities Council Rosedale Bank</p>
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**115** Teachers Placed for Internships or Field Experiences in City Neighbors Schools

City Neighbors holds strong to the call to action that all students in Baltimore City deserve a rich, high-quality education. As part of this mission, we work to create great, high-demand schools to serve the over 800 students who attend our schools and to create a model of what public education might be. Another equally important part of this mission is to support individuals, schools and organizations to grow, dream, strive, consider and improve.

Our work includes partnering with many local universities in the training of future teachers, welcoming 300 current and future educators each year to our schools by hosting events like our Annual Progressive Education Summit and Education Ignite, providing direct consultation and support to other charter and traditional public schools, and so much more.

**1,700** Visitors to Learn about Our Model and Approach

**SUE FOTHERGILL, Founding Parent and Board Member**  
City Neighbors Charter School

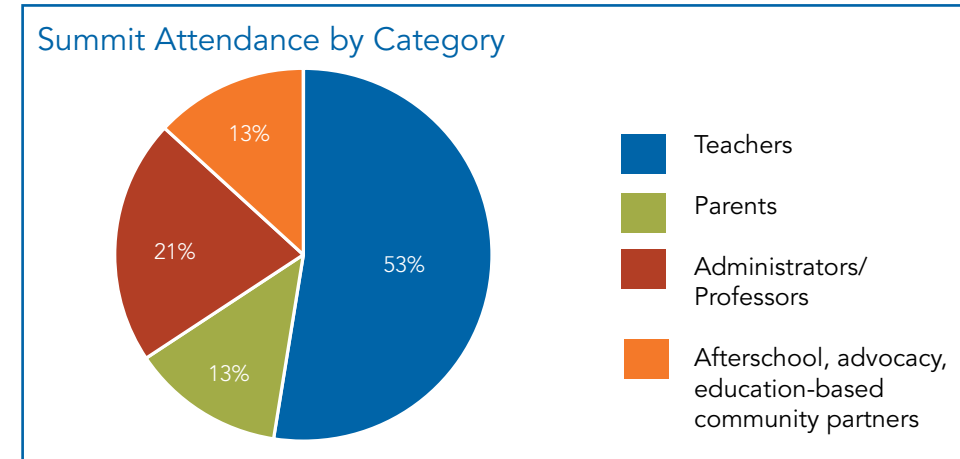
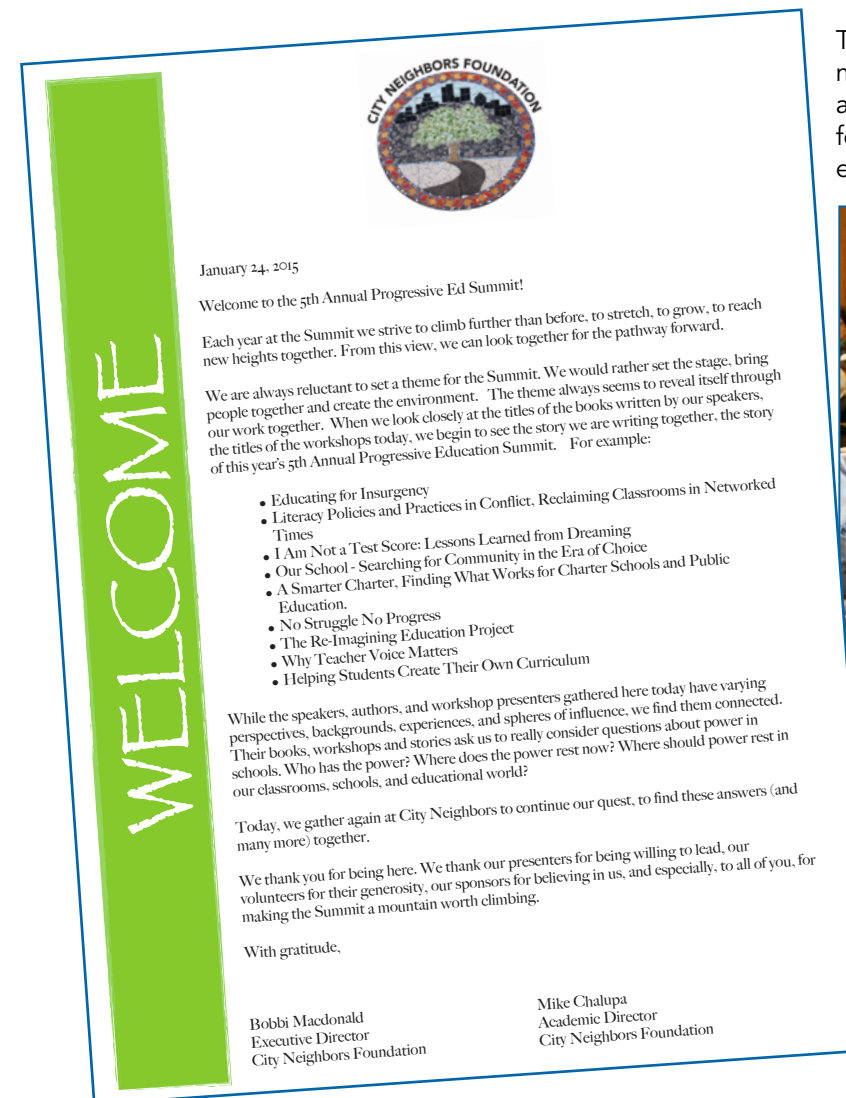
On January 23, 2009, an article ran in the *Baltimore Sun* about a proposed state funding cut to public education of more than \$74 million. There were state deficits across the country and Maryland was no exception. Of the \$74 million statewide cut, Baltimore City Public Schools, a school district that had been determined to be unconstitutionally underfunded, bore 32% of the burden or \$23 million.

In the face of these harmful cuts, we took action, starting with phone calls to our partners and friends. We contacted the leadership at City Schools and the ACLU. As folks picked up and dropped off their children, we invited them to call the Governor's office and advocate against the cut. Just a few days later we were in a room of leaders from more than forty organizations, all united in the belief that our children deserved better.

We organized, we rallied, we lobbied and we won. The legislature made the public education budget whole for Baltimore City and the entire state. We helped found the Baltimore Education Coalition, and I had the honor of serving as its founding co-chair for the first three years. We believe in our students and their ability to achieve and to create. We also know that can only happen when we have the resources needed to adequately serve our children and support our staff. We are vigilant in that effort for not only City Neighbors, but for all of Baltimore City.

**THE ANNUAL PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION SUMMIT**

The Annual Progressive Education Summit brings together educators and community members from all parts of the region for a day of professional development, networking, and inspiration. Each year, we launch our Summit with a Keynote Speaker and host over forty workshops presented by local progressive educators. In the past 5 years over 1,500 educators have participated in the Summit.



Keynote Speakers: Ron Berger • Deborah Meier • Eleanor Duckworth • Alfie Kohn • Steve Seidel • Howard Fuller

# A school doing education right

## City Neighbors emphasizes arts, gets good scores

City Neighbors Charter School Principal Michael Chalupa (left) meets with parents (and some toddlers) during a monthly session of "Coffee with Mike." (Sun photo by Amy Davis / September 18, 2007)

# A principled principal

The character of City Neighbors leader Mike Chalupa has touched his staff

**By Peter French**

If I consider the span of my 59 years, there is an obvious theme: I don't deal well with authority. When my high school tennis coach wouldn't let me wear my tie-die t-shirt to a match, I stormed off the bus. I was fired as a waiter after following a patron out the door to lecture her on how to tip. At a Baltimore City charter school, I left two schools because of my inability to accept what I considered overbearing principals. A third principal, overbearing in a different way, sent me packing before I could quit.

Then I met Mike Chalupa, who changed everything for me.

In August 2005, still hopeful of finding a school where the needs and aspirations of children came before a principal's obsession with test scores, I joined the staff of a brand new charter school, City Neighbors.

That first year was not a seamless success. It was hardly surprising. You had the aspirations of a bundle of parents who had labored for years to create a unique place for their kids to learn. The parents had committed themselves to the principles of Reggio Emilia, an Italian philosophy that called for infusing art into every school subject. Combine that with a diverse group of newly hired teachers who, mostly, came from traditional school experiences. We couldn't speak the same language. It was a daily struggle.

Despite some mistakes, those early months convinced me I'd landed in a new

educational universe. Bobbi Macdonald, a founding parent and a hurricane force, helped design an arch, still on display, to explain the school's philosophy. It showed students at the top, followed by teachers and the principal. Teachers selected one of their own to serve as a voting member on the Board of Directors. Bobbi made the rounds that first year, asking teachers, "What do you want? What do you need?" Coaches appeared, along with bookshelves, curtains for the windows, money for field trips.

I began to sense power as a teacher for the first time in my career.

Then, just as we were gaining momentum, an unexpected bump. The first principal hired by the parents decided to leave and return to Colorado.

A lucky roll of the dice tossed Mike Chalupa our way, and it didn't take long before even someone as arrogant as I was won over. Dopey entwined in his DNA is the belief that teachers are the overwhelming influence in a student's life, and a principal's primary mission is to support that relationship. A perfect match.

I will never be able to reconcile how Mike could take every lousy idea of mine could run over the top. Six years ago, while I was teaching on the Hill, I made an offhand remark to Jim about how compelling it would be for the students to visit a concentration camp.

"How can we make that happen?" he asked.

A month later, a group of German social workers visited our school and we discussed

the possibility of a student exchange. I following year, I was on a plane bound for Germany with fifteen eighth-graders. I spent several unforgettable hours in Stuttgart silencing walking the grounds of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp north of Berlin before heading to host families in Leipzig. The student exchange has continued for the past five years. Mike has maintained that money will be found. He has kept his word, along with bookshelves, curtains for the windows, money for field trips.

Unless you have an appointment, I don't see him. He could be in any of a million places — a special education review, meeting with his group of middle school advisers, attending his monthly coffee with parents, sitting in the back of a classroom. At the beginning of every school day, Mike stands at the top of a set of stairs and greets all the children.

A few months ago, Mike asked to speak one-on-one. We found the library empty. He was leaving as principal of City Neighbors; he was becoming academic director of the three City Neighbors schools.

My most productive years in the classroom have been with Mike beside me. Despite my many shortcomings, Mike is a man who has unleashed in my teaching energy that I had never experienced. I have been deeply touched by his character and actions of this man.

Peter French is a reading and social studies middle school teacher at City Neighbors Charter School in Northeast Baltimore. His email is [pfr17@comcast.net](mailto:pfr17@comcast.net).

# The Original Charter School Vision

By RICHARD D. KAHLBERG and HALLEY POTTER

AUG. 30

ALTHOUGH the leaders of teachers unions and charter schools are often in warring camps today, the origins for charter schools came from Albert Shanker, the president of the American Federation of Teachers.

In a 1988 address, Mr. Shanker outlined an idea for a new kind of public school where teachers could work with fresh and innovative ways of reaching students. Mr. Shanker estimated that only one-fifth of students were well served by traditional classrooms. In charter schools, teachers would be given the freedom to draw upon their expertise to create high-performing educational laboratories from which the nation's schools could learn.

# Astronaut Reid Wiseman returns to Baltimore, regaling students and grownups with space station tales

Three months ago, as he plunged from outer space back to Earth, the Maryland-born astronaut Reid Wiseman hit the ground hard, slamming into a snow-covered field in Kazakhstan and rolling over a few times before he was rescued.

Wiseman, a U.S. Navy commander who grew up in Baltimore, returned to his hometown for the first time since his Nov. 16 landing in Kazakhstan. He spent his time with family and old friends.

At places like the Maryland Science Center, where he was speaking Wednesday, Wiseman, 39, has gotten rock-star treatment.

"I got two autographs," exclaimed 9-year-old Autumn Thurman, a third-grader at City Neighbors Hamilton in Baltimore. "One's for my [school] journal, one's for me. And I'm not giving them away."

"It's the least I can do to share the incredible experience I had as a first-time [space] flyer," a smiling Wiseman said between his high-energy talks Wednesday. "And I love having this opportunity to spark the imagination of our young people."

At his home, Wiseman has a model of the International Space Station and a collection of space-related items. He also has a small pet named "Rocket."

# Smarter Charters

Richard D. Kahlenberg and Halley Potter

The current direction of charter schools has limited their potential to improve public education. Here are some ideas for a better approach.

The charter school model is full of promise. Charter schools can reach across neighborhood school boundaries and create a more integrated system. They can provide a more personalized and rigorous education for students. They can also provide a more cost-effective and efficient way to deliver education.

# Don't leave charter schools behind [Commentary]

Baltimore's charter school students also deserve quality facilities

By Hobbi Macdonald

3:49 PM EST, January 28, 2014

The people of Baltimore care about inequity. We think about what is fair and right, and together, we have come up with some great solutions to some of the disparities we see in our city. The Baltimore Education Coalition, the ACT 21, Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development, and the city's school system recently brought to light the injustice of students being taught in school buildings that are clearly inadequate. Some facilities had no heat in the winter and no air conditioning in the summer. Windows were painted shut, water fountains didn't work and the walls in some classrooms were crumbling.

There was a groundswell of support for renovations, and the schools across the city — including the city's charter schools — worked together to make city residents' voices heard to help change the way we finance debt for public school buildings. Now, 15 new city schools will be built and dozens more renovated. There is more work to be done, but if we continue these efforts, one day every single public school building in Baltimore will be standing as a symbol for how we see our students. Every building will be in good shape, designed for success, and a place that is more than adequate — a place that we can love and care for, just as we love and care for the children we are here to serve.

# Voters of tomorrow weigh in on today's questions

Students at City Neighbors Charter School in Baltimore have been asked to weigh in on questions related to the city's future.

The school is currently engaged in a project to collect input from students on various issues, including the city's budget, transportation, and education. The project is part of a larger effort to involve young people in the city's decision-making process.

# Educators call for an end to PARCC testing

By Robert Dietzen

PARCC testing is a huge burden on students and teachers alike. It is a waste of time and money that does little to improve student learning. Educators across the state are calling for an end to this testing regime and for a more focused and effective assessment system.

# Charters and Districts (Begin to) Collaborate

Common challenges drive joint efforts at a local level

by LAURA PAPPANO

Volume 30, Number 8  
November/December 2014

District and charter school teachers train together to become principals in Connecticut.

...rest are teachers from district of Achievement First and three

# Principal

## The Promise of Project-based Learning

North-grader Sabrina Donick, left, reads during "pod time" at City Neighbors High School, a new public charter school. It's the pod that it's its new city high school offers 'home away from home'

Charter features interior design, program aimed to foster development

popular City Neighbors Hamilton Charter School in Northwest Baltimore. The high school has students representing 22 countries around the city, half of whom are from the city's public schools. It will eventually expand to 10th grade.

Macdonald said it isn't the smallest size that will foster the growth of the new high school. It's about supporting and empowering students, and changing the traditional idea of what a school can be.

# Maryland law holds back charter schools

BY MIKE CHALUPA AND BOBBI MACDONALD

Maryland law states that the purpose of charter schools is to bring innovation to the public school system. The premise of the law is that groups of dedicated and talented folks can come together to manifest a unique model for a school. It acknowledges that there may be many paths to a great education and that does not fit all. This all should be done.

# Studies Illustrate Plight of Introverted Students

Published in Print: May 23, 2012, as Studies Highlight Classroom Plight of Quiet Students

Introverted students often struggle in classroom settings that favor extroverted personalities. These students may feel isolated and have difficulty participating in group activities. Educators should be aware of these challenges and provide support to help these students thrive in the classroom.

# Walking for water

'Drought for a Day' lesson teaches about Africa, global warming

By Erin Moran  
LCSHOW/BAKES/STANCOOM

The middle-school students were tired and their backs hurt from the heavy packs they had been carrying, but they were smiling as they trudged back to their school on Wednesday morning, each carrying three of these water jugs.

The lesson for City Neighbors Charter School students was about the scarcity of water in some places in the world and what people go through to meet their basic needs. In Why Zowya, the African town the students have studied, people have to walk as much as 100 miles to get water for just one day. So teacher Peter French decided to have about 60 students walk about two miles to his house, fill up their water jugs from his tap and then walk back to school.

The students had brought gallon milk jugs, soda bottles or water bottles to fill at their backpacks and plastic bags.

"It's really heavy," said Tyler Robit, an eighth-grader.

Several students talked to me about being a wagon to haul the water, but they said their teachers forbade that. Another student carried his water in a cylinder that he fashioned from a sweat shirt around his neck.

Ashley Gray, 12, said she and her friends were participating in their "Drought for a Day" because they wanted to know what it would be like to walk that far.

"We have tons of water every day," said Adriana Conway, 11, adding that she and her friends were the previous crowd.

Students carry water from teacher Peter French's house two miles back to City Neighbors Charter School. The exercise was part of a "Drought for a Day" lesson on what people have to do to survive in parts of Africa and the likely effect of global warming.

# AUDACIOUS IDEAS

THOUGHTS ABOUT HOW TO CHANGE BALTIMORE FOR THE BETTER

## We are after what is not easily measured or defined—a great education

Posted on Monday, January 24, 2011 by Bobbi Macdonald and Michael Chalupa

We see a marked trend in the world of education — especially in urban education. In a well-intentioned attempt to leave no child behind and to raise the levels of poor-performing schools in cities across America, we have misguidedly narrowed our responsibility in educating young people, choosing to define successful schools primarily by what can be easily measured and tested. Under the banner of "achievement" or "excellence" as defined by tests, we push aside essential ideas of education — creativity, inventiveness, real-world problem solving, theory of mind, emotional intelligence, collaboration, personal reflection, and so much more.

# Sauerkraut und Rostbratwurststernchen

Schüler und Lehrer aus Baltimore zu Besuch an der 16. Mittelschule in Volkmarsdorf

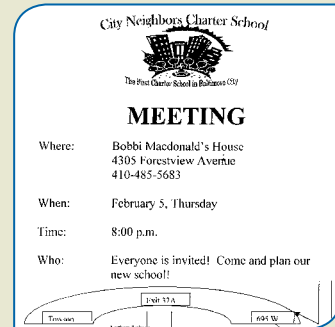
Das war ein Tag, an dem wir uns sehr freuen konnten. Die 16. Mittelschule in Volkmarsdorf hat uns eingeladen, um unsere Erfahrung zu teilen. Die Schüler und Lehrer sind sehr herzlich und wir haben viel gelernt. Wir haben auch viele tolle Fotos gemacht.



# CITY NEIGHBORS: A Decade of Accomplishments

2003

- First meeting held in the Macdonald's living room



Sept. 6, 2005:  
Opening Day!

2005

- September 6: Opening Day!  
K - 5th grade: 120 students!



2004

- Charter submitted to City Schools
- Loan guarantee goes forward with Abell Foundation
- Lease signed with Church
- Founding teachers hired
- Approval of Charter

2006

- Mike Chalupa hired as principal; he will serve in this role until 2014
- Win battle to keep our assistant teachers
- Diversity Statement created
- Middle school designed and launched

2007

- "The City Neighbors Way" is created with students, teachers and parents
- When the student application waitlist reached 500 students, City Neighbors Board of Directors votes to launch the City Neighbors Foundation, and establish two more City Neighbors' schools, including a high school.



Mike's steady and sure presence helped create a learning environment where students and teachers were respected and heard.

2009

- First Graduation at CNCS
- Launch of the City Neighbors Foundation. Bobbi Macdonald becomes Executive Director. Mike Chalupa becomes part-time Academic Director
- City Neighbors Hamilton opens K-3: 88 students
- Help launch the Baltimore Education Coalition; protect over 58 million in public school funding

2008

- Win the Court of Appeals battle for equitable funding
- Sign lease for Hamilton Campus to house two more schools
- Finance 10.5 million in renovations through private bond placement guaranteed by school system
- CNCS receives a three-year renewal



2011

- 1st Annual Symposium of all City Neighbors teachers
- CNCS receives a five-year renewal



2010

- City Neighbors High School opens 9th grade: 88 students
- 1st Annual Progressive Ed Summit

2012



- CNH receives a three-year renewal

2013

- First Graduation of CNHS: 94% graduation rate
- Meyerhoff Foundation gives \$225,000 investment over three years to launch the City Neighbors Foundation

2015

- Ten Year Celebration!
- CNH first graduation



2014

- Mike Chalupa becomes full time Academic Director
- CNHS receives five-year renewal
- City Neighbors Fab Lab of Inspiration opens on Hamilton Campus
- Going national: City Neighbors is featured in *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and *A Smarter Charter*
- CNHS first graduation





THE 2015 CITY NEIGHBORS FOUNDATION COUNCIL

City Neighbors Charter School (est. 2005)

Gwendolyn Unoko, *President*

Nick Brown, *Principal*

Peter Redgrave, *Teacher*

Amanda Gursky, *Fundraising Chair*

City Neighbors Hamilton (est. 2009)

Felicity Knox, *President*

Obi Okobi, *Principal*

Bob Dietzen, *Teacher*

Jason Lee, *Treasurer*

City Neighbors High School (est. 2010)

Zina Moore, *President*

Danique Dolly, *Principal*

Moses Roberts, *Teacher*

Nichol Ryan, *Parent*



If you could have the “Best School You Can Imagine,” what would it be?

The City Neighbors Foundation works to impact public education in three ways: We operate a network of innovative schools, we provide professional development opportunities for teachers and we work to create an environment that allows great schools to thrive in Baltimore, in Maryland, and beyond.

Guided by the belief that children are creative, capable, powerful and worthy of the deepest respect, the City Neighbors approach is rooted in the arts, project-based learning and inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy—committed to having every student be Known, Loved, and Inspired.