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## Urban Community School grows its campus through partnerships

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Contributed photo

The Urban Community School in Cleveland has been adding to its campus through partnerships.

The Refugee Response and Facing History and Ourselves will be the latest additions to the pre-K-8 school community.

[Urban Community School](#) in Cleveland takes a holistic approach to education. But a school can only offer so much on its own.

"We saw some really glaring gaps for our kids and families that we wanted to address," said president Tom Gill.

The school's leadership saw a need for health care services and childcare, Gill said, as well as for after-school and summer programming. The school couldn't support all of those needs on its own.

So the Urban Community School looked to grow its partnerships with area institutions, offering its campus as a potential home.

Urban Community School, created by the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland, has been part of Northeast Ohio since 1968. The pre-K-8 school focuses on the "academic, social, emotional, physical, spiritual" needs of students, Gill said. It enrolled about 570 students this year.

The school moved to its current campus in 2003, with the current school building at West 48th Street and Lorain Avenue in Cleveland opening up two years later. The initial land for the campus came from a donation, but the school has added to it over the years through the city and county land banks, Gill said.

Urban Community School isn't following any specific model for its campus growth, but it has looked to the Harlem Children's Zone and Educare for inspiration when building these collaborations, Gill said. Both programs offer students and families wraparound services beyond the academic. It was a trip to see an Educare site in 2010, when Gill was development director for the school, that really started the current conversation. And a significant gift in 2012 started the plan on its current path, he said.

"It was a combination of, we were planning. We knew what we wanted. We did not have the funding. And then we had the funding, and we knew exactly what we wanted to do," Gill said. "And it really took off from there."

Today, its campus is home to sites for out-of-school programs Urban Squash, House of Champions and the Lacrosse Communities Project. And in 2020, MetroHealth opened a family health center on the campus. That center brought the health care services Urban Community School sought but also services such as legal aid and a pharmacy, Gill said.

Soon, Urban Community School will welcome to its campus longtime partners The Refugee Response, and Facing History and Ourselves.

Facing History and Ourselves has been located in Cleveland Heights, but moving to the Urban Community School campus — and Cleveland — is a good fit, said Cleveland-area executive director Mark Swaim-Fox. Most of the schools the organization serves locally are in the city, including one named for Facing History in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

Facing History helps teachers and schools think about their curriculum in a new way. It's about using "moments in time" to look at human behavior and to think about what people today can do to "create a better world," Swaim-Fox said. For example, when teaching about the Holocaust, teachers would be encouraged to examine choices individuals made to perpetrate or stand against those horrific acts.

Locally, Facing History and Ourselves works with about 4,000 teachers in about 500 different schools. And about five years ago, Facing History formed a network of schools in the Cleveland area that included Urban Community School to further embed the group's curriculum into their teaching, Swaim-Fox said. This latest move takes that partnership a step further.

Swaim-Fox said the organization is still waiting for permits to be finalized, but he hopes to move into the Urban Community School location this fall.

The Refugee Response and Facing History sites are being designed to look like homes, so they fit in the neighborhood, Gill said. The House of Champions space was built similarly. A lot of the growth is being funded through a \$20 million campaign. The Urban Community School surpassed that goal last year, Gill said, but the campaign continues.

Working with nonprofits allows Urban Community School to expand its services, and it gives nonprofits a place to grow without a large infrastructure commitment, as they have access to the campus.

Going forward, the Urban Community School's master plan calls for adding another two nonprofit partners to its campus, Gill said. Those partners have not yet been identified.

Inline Play

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