

Schools That Can
Validation Study for
The Intergenerational School
CLEVELAND, OH

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The Intergenerational School

History and Mission. The Intergenerational School (TIS) is an Ohio Community (Charter) school that provides a free, public education to any child from the greater Cleveland area whose parent or guardian chooses this school option. The school began operations during School Year (SY) 2000-2001 with 30 students and currently enrolls close to 100 students. Each year an additional group of students (corresponding approximately to a grade level in more conventional terms) has been added to the school, and the intent is to add another level next year. The mission of the school is to foster an educational community of excellence that provides experiences and skills for lifelong learning and spirited citizenship for learners of all ages. The school occupies one full floor and part of a second floor within the Fairhill Center, a former hospital setting that currently serves as a site for a variety of social service support agencies to the community in addition to housing the Intergenerational school.

The school has several core values that shape its educational mission. The school values: personal integrity, a work ethic, choice and accountability, celebration of diversity, interpersonal skills, shared and responsible use of resources, and honoring the interconnected web of life and time. Each student's performance relative to these values is described on the school's report to parents. These values help support the school's philosophy, which drive the entire educational program and which revolve around two main concepts: Learning is a lifelong developmental process, and; Knowledge is constructed in the context of culture, experience and community. The developmental process of learning and the constructivist approach to knowledge creation are at the heart of the school's curriculum and are discussed in greater depth later in this narrative. Suffice it to indicate at this point that lifelong learning is taken very seriously by the school: elderly citizens who attend social service programs operated within the Fairhill Center serve as mentors for many students at The Intergenerational School. TIS also had an outreach component with local institutions of higher education. During my visit, nursing students from a local college were visiting the school, and a couple of them assisted in a science lesson on plant and animal cells.

In addition to classroom content, students are exposed to music and art once weekly and computer instruction. The school has a computer lab with enough PC computers to accommodate an entire class. School hours are from 8:00 AM to 2:30 PM daily. The teacher:student ratio is 9.6:1.

Because TIS is a public community (charter) school, it does not charge tuition and receives a per capita allocation from public sources similar to other Cleveland public schools. However, the

school finds that the allotment is insufficient to fulfill its academic mission and undertakes its own fundraising program, collecting a total of almost \$200,000 during the past three years.

Finally, the Ohio Department of Education has a five-point designation system to rate the quality of each school's performance. The five possible designations are: Excellent, Effective Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch, and Academic Emergency. TIS has been designated by the state education department as Excellent, having met or surpassed all of its indicators. TIS was one of very few schools in Cleveland to have achieved this status.

Students. The school currently serves almost 100 students, the substantial majority of whom are African-American. The school does not have a traditional grade level structure but instead focuses on students' developmental levels, with 32 students identified as having emerging skills, 40 as possessing beginning skills, 12 as developing, six as refining and five as applying, the highest current designation of skill level within the school's framework. The majority of students are poor and qualify for the free and/or reduced price lunch program. Attendance has been stable at between 95% and 96% for the past several years. This figure is six percentage points higher than the average attendance rate for the Cleveland public school district where The Intergenerational School is located. Additional detail about the students appears in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographics for The Intergenerational School

Students enrolled	95
Pre K	0
Lower School (K-5)	84
Middle School (6-8)	11
Percent Caucasian	5
Percent African American	84
Percent Hispanic	0
Percent Asian	1
Percent eligible for free/reduced price lunch	63
Percent mobility rate	25
Percent special education	4
Attendance rate	95.5%

Administration and teachers. The school has one chief educator and 10 teaching staff, 90% of whom are certified, including all classroom teachers. The only professional staff person who is not fully certified is the physical education teacher who works on a long-term substitute license. The school retains almost all of its teachers annually, and most of the teachers whom I interviewed taught at the school at least three years. Many of the teachers received their professional degrees at Ursuline College and participated in a degree program that stressed constructivist education. Thus, the teachers' professional training was aligned with the demands and expectations of their everyday working environment at TIS. Every teacher was highly enthusiastic about the working environment and every classroom teacher believed that the school provides a sound education for its students.

The reason why teachers spoke in such glowing terms about the school was the quality of leadership they experience on a daily basis. I interviewed all eight classroom teachers in pairs, and each pair, when asked to indicate three reasons why the school was good, began their responses by invoking the name of Dr. Cathy Whitehouse, the chief education officer who conceptualized the academic programs of the school and has led school since its inception. All teachers at the school were hired by Dr. Whitehouse, trained by her, and most importantly, supported by her. The leadership of the school is so supportive that teachers voluntarily spend many extra hours during the week, and at times weekends, at the school engaged in various professional activities.

Parent satisfaction. A one-page survey questionnaire was distributed by the administration to a 20% sample of parents, or 19 parents. The question asked each parent to indicate on a five-point scale the extent of their satisfaction with the education their child is receiving at The Intergenerational School. Table 2 below displays the results.

Table 2
Parent Satisfaction.

Overall, how satisfied are you with the education your child is receiving?				
Not at all	A little	A fair amount	A good amount	A lot
0	0	0	5	14

All 19 parents were satisfied with their child's education.

Curriculum and Pedagogy. As indicated earlier in the narrative, developmental stages rather than the more traditional grade level serve as the main grouping and placement strategy for the

school. Each developmental stage has an approximate grade level equivalent, as follows: Emerging (K-1); Beginning (1-2); Developing (3); Refining (4); Applying (5-6). Students must complete Emerging and Beginning Stages prior to being identified as 3rd grade equivalent students for purposes of participating in State assessments, which begin at the third grade. Students who do not exhibit mastery at the earlier stages are given additional time to build a firm foundation for academic success. Not all students will make a successful transition from one developmental stage to next during the course on an academic year, although most will. However, even for students who do not make the transition, clear indication of progress in attaining objectives is expected.

The curriculum and accompanying pedagogy to apply the curriculum, self was developed by Dr. Whitehouse in consultation with the teachers. Teaching at TIS is holistic, meaning-based, and constructivist. In contrast, the excellent program developed primarily by the teachers to manage children's disruptive behavior borrows heavily from principles of applied behavior analysis, which is not constructivist in its theoretical foundation.

The holistic emphasis stresses the "whole student," including each student's knowledge level, attitudes, talent culture, interests and experiences. Here, considerable emphasis is placed on community and student empowerment. Students were engaged in shared learning experiences during the majority of my classroom observations.

The meaning-based component of the school's pedagogy emphasizes broad conceptual understanding that led to real and authentic learning. My classroom observations in classes spanning the entire developmental spectrum of the school witnessed students engaging in tasks that would enable them to become "learners and thinkers."

The constructivist component of the school's pedagogy means that students must construct his or her own understanding. In a constructivist based curriculum, rote learning is de-emphasized and is replaced by a focus on the application of the learning.

The developmental focus of the school's curriculum has yielded very impressive performance on the Ohio State academic assessments. In Table 3 reading and math performance data are presented for the Intergenerational School and two comparison groups. The first comparison group is the Alexander Graham Bell elementary school, a local Cleveland public school located a few blocks away from the Intergenerational School, and presumably drawing its students from the same catchments area. The second comparison group is local Cleveland public school district in which the Intergenerational School and the Alexander Graham Bell Schools are located. Data are presented for grades three through six for three successive school years. Because TIS is a relatively new school, some data were not available for SY 2003-2004 and therefore comparisons were not presented. Even a very cursory review of the data appearing in Table 3 indicate that students at GIS meet or exceed Ohio State standards (75% passing) at far greater rates than the average for the local Cleveland public school district. TIS also surpasses

the performance levels of the Alexander Graham Bell school by substantial margins, although these margins are not as great as for the school district as a whole. Note especially that during the most recent assessment period, SY 2005-2006, across all grade levels TIS students achieve State math standards at a rate at least twice that of local school district students. At the sixth grade level, this disparity is almost threefold. In most cases below, I retrieved performance data from the Ohio Department of Education website and did not rely on data supplied by the school. Only in those few instances when data were not available on line did I use the data the school provided.

As with any school, a curriculum and accompanying pedagogy cannot be provided if teachers are unable to manage students' behavior. When the school first began, teachers had difficulty maintaining control of their classes, According to some of the teachers who have been at the school since its beginning. The teachers felt a great need to implement strategies to maintain behavioral control. Over a couple of years the teachers implemented and refined a highly effective program to maintain discipline and focus in their classes. The program developed by the teachers in consultation with Dr. Whitehouse, uses principle of applied behavioral analysis, or a simple reward and consequence system for appropriate and inappropriate behavior, respectively. In general terms, the program employs on a "three strike" model, whereby students get a warning from the teacher for the first infraction, speak to the principal after the second, and are sent home after the third infraction. Teachers have considerable latitude in how they elect to implement the program, although the general principles are the same throughout the school and are totally supported by the school administration.

The combination of an effective behavior management program and a developmentally appropriate academic curriculum combine to create a top-tier school. The extent to which the school is able to deliver an effective education is evident from the data displayed in Table 3 on the following pages.

Table 3
Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Better on State Assessments: Three School Years

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>03-04</u>	<u>04-05</u>	<u>05-06</u>
3	Reading	Intergen.	78.6	100	100
3	Reading	Alexander Graham Bell	71.4	60	61.7
3	Reading	Local School District	58.2	67.2	50.7
3	Math	Intergen.	N/A	100	100
3	Math	Alex. Graham Bell		60	55.3
3	Math	Local district		67.2	43.4
4	Reading	Intergen.	71.4	80	75
4	Reading	Alex. Graham Bell	56.8	76.6	59.6
4	Reading	Local district	55.1	59	51.4
4	Math	Intergen	N/A	60	100
4	Math	Alex. Graham Bell		70.2	61.4
4	Math	Local district		52.9	48

Continued

Grade	Subject	School	03-04	04-05	05-06
5	Reading	Intergen.	N/A	100	80
5	Reading	Alex. Graham Bell		76.5	45.5
5	Reading	Local district		53.7	44.9
5	Math	Intergen.	N/A	N/A	60
5	Math	Alex. Graham Bell			24.2
5	Math	Local district			28.3
6	Read	Intergen.	N/A	100	100
6	Read	Alex. Graham Bell		87	66.7
6	Read	Local district		50	59.1
6	Math	Intergen.	N/A	100	100
6	Math	Alex. Graham Bell		93.5	33.3
6	Math	Local district		41.1	34.5

Recommendations. The Intergenerational School offers an excellent educational program to its students, and any recommendations I could make would simply constitute little more than tinkering at the edges. This said, I offer the following suggestions for the professional staff to consider.

- There was surprisingly little student work displayed in the school, either in the classrooms or in the corridors. In my experience, students enjoy seeing their (good) work displayed publicly and find it highly motivating.
- During my interviews with teachers regarding the value and effectiveness of the behavior management program, I noticed that there was far heavier emphasis placed on the consequences than the reinforcements. For the past dozen years, possibly more, the national emphasis in programs designed to manage disruptive behavior has been on primarily on the use positive supports, with consequences occurring only after the reinforcements have not been effective. Only one pair of teachers to whom I interviewed even mentioned using positive supports. All other teachers spoke mostly in varying degrees about consequences for inappropriate behavior. The program might be even better than it currently is if teachers shifted their focus slightly to concentrate on supporting positive behaviors.
- The school should consider engaging in a publicity campaign to highlight their accomplishments. For a school that produces such consistently high academic performance, I was surprised that there was not a lengthy waiting list of parents clamoring to have their children attend TIS.

APPENDIX A

BILL TRAYLOR INSTITUTE FOR INNER CITY EDUCATION

CRITERIA FOR MEMBERSHIP

2005

A Bill Traylor School provides families and students from economically disadvantaged urban areas with an education based on the following criteria:

- 1. Located in inner-city and primarily serving an economically disadvantaged population of students that are representative of its community**
- 2. Striving to achieve superior levels of academic performance as measured by objective assessments and outcomes**
- 3. Emphasizing character based education**
- 4. Providing a safe, disruption-free, non discriminatory environment, where teachers can teach and children can learn**
- 5. Valued by parents and actively engaged within their communities**
- 6. Characterized by dedicated and effective leadership**
- 7. Attaining a high level of sustainability**
- 8. Willing to share “best practices” and assist other schools.**

APPENDIX B

VALIDATON BOARD PLAN

BACKGROUND

Started in 1998 as the Bill Traylor Foundation, an informal network of four high performing schools, the organization has evolved into SCHOOLS THAT CAN (STC), a nationwide network of fifteen schools that have agreed to meet STC's membership criteria. Up to fifteen new schools will be added during each of the next two years. All schools serve children living the inner city of large metropolitan areas who have few alternatives to receive a quality education. STC is a 501(c) 3 charitable organization.

Based on the shared vision of our board and the network of our outstanding schools, we recognize that, in spite of many challenges, we are in a position to make a difference in helping to improve inner city education.

STC is committed to continue to expand the number of member schools, document that each school meets STC Criteria for Membership, identify why each school has achieved its high level of success (identify best practices), and share the results with other STC schools as well as with public schools. Each member school will be validated approximately every three years. The Validation Study also will be used to assess potential new member schools. Member schools will use the report internally to identify areas for improvement as well for fund raising (most member schools have identified fund raising as their biggest challenge). Each three years STC and the school will be able to track improvements in academic performance as highlighted by the previous report.

VALIDATON BOARD

Member schools want to be validated by professional, objective educators: an independent assessment of their current position, including the identification of areas to be improved. To this end, STC has created an independent Validation Board (VB), consisting of professional educators from across the country. The VB is responsible for the Validation Study process and the format and contents of the reports.

Last fall, STC engaged Dr. Jay Gottlieb professor of Education at NYU, to evaluate the first six schools. The Perkins Malo Hunter Foundation, has agreed to fund 15 school evaluations during 2005-2006 and in each of the next two years, is funding the project.

Validation Board Composition

- ◆ Validation Board consists of leading educators representing a cross section of the country who serve for a period of three years.
- ◆ Four representative heads of schools serve on the Validation Board as advisors to provide input from member schools.

University Educators

West Coast: Dr. Dr. Richard Fliegel, Department of Education, University of Southern California, Los Angeles

Mid-West: Dr. Patty Horsch, Professor, Erikson Institute – Graduate School in Child Development, Chicago

East Coast

Dr. Jay Gottlieb, ex-officio, Professor of Educational Psychology, New York University, New York

Coordinator and STC Advisor: Seymour Fliegel, President, Gilder Senior Fellow, Center for Educational Innovation (CEI), New York

VB Head of School Representatives:

Mike Piscal, Head of School, View Park Preparatory Accelerated Charter School, Los Angeles, West Coast

Cheryl Collins, Holy Family Lutheran School, Chicago, Mid-west

Spencer Blasdale, Director, Academy of the Pacific Rim, Boston, East Coast

AB Whitfield, Co-Principal and Chief Operating Officer, Trey Whitfield School, Brooklyn, NY Metro area

March 6, 2006

Biography

Jay Gottlieb is a professor of educational psychology in the Department of Teaching and Learning at New York University. He received his doctorate in 1972 from Yeshiva University in New York City and has spent the past thirty years conducting teaching and conducting research and evaluations in urban schools. His research focuses on the education of at-risk students and students with disabilities. Dr. Gottlieb has served as a special education expert for federal and state court cases involving special education, studied special education in the Oslo, Norway public schools, and participated in the drafting of reports to re-organize special and remedial education in the New York City schools. He has published 90 articles in various professional sources and has been the principal investigator of about two dozen research grants and contracts as well as director of several training grants, including one to train doctoral level researchers in applied research. Dr. Gottlieb was a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, a member of numerous other professional organizations, and at various points in his career, served on the editorial boards of half dozen professional journals. Dr. Gottlieb also served two terms as an elected public school trustee in his community.