

Big School on Campus

How a Clark University Program Gives Worcester a Shot in the Arm and Students a Shot at College

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It's the hottest day of the summer and whirring fans barely stir the air in an upstairs classroom at the University Park Campus School (UPCS) on Freeland Street in Worcester, Mass.

Ordinarily, 15-year-old Dao Tran would be at the beach. Instead, she and two other UPCS sophomores who did poorly in science last year, listen intently as Dermot Shea, UPCS science and math teacher and 1994 National Science Educator, describes the workings of the inner ear.

Shea gestures frequently, leaning toward his students who sit in a semi-circle, their chairs just a few feet from his. He asks questions about the lesson, the students answer correctly. "Because the students and I know each other well," Shea tells a visitor, "we accomplish a great deal in a short time."

Across the hall, third through sixth graders read *The Wizard of Oz* with June Eressy, the Worcester Teacher of the Year who heads the UPCS summer program. When they finish reading the book, the students will write about the gift they would ask for from the wonderful Wizard of Oz.

In a basement-level classroom, an enthusiastic group of students ranging in age from 8 to 11 work on colorful paper weavings. Christine Lucey-Meagher, who teaches art at the A.L.L. (Accelerated Learning Laboratory) School in Worcester during the regular school year, explains that the kids are learning pattern and color design in addition to honing their fine motor skills. "Miss Christine," as the children call her, teaches six art classes a day during UPCS's four-week academic and summer camp program, supported by grants from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the Balfour Foundation.

Opened in 1997, UPCS is among the most innovative aspects of Clark's nationally prominent multi-million-dollar revitalization effort to clean up Worcester's deteriorating Main South neighborhood and encourage staff and faculty to buy homes there. The school, like the broader initiative, is the product of a model partnership among Clark, Worcester Public Schools, the Worcester School Committee, Main South Community Development Corp., city agencies including the police department, and parents.

A public school, UPCS enrolls students in grades 7 through 12. Clark professors teach at the school. Clark students serve as student teachers and mentors to UPCS students, who also attend some classes and lectures on the university campus. Perhaps most important to the schoolchildren, 78 percent of whom qualify for the federal school lunch program, Clark

has pledged to admit, tuition-free, all UPCS graduates who meet regular entrance requirements as long as they have lived in the Main South neighborhood for five years. Clark and its partners are eagerly watching to see how many members of the charter class of 2004 end up attending the university.

The remedial component of the summer program is open only to UPCS students. But the enrichment activities, like Miss Christine's art class and the month-long camp, including supervised soccer and basketball games across the street in the Goddard School playground and swimming in Clark's pool, are open to all neighborhood kids in grades 3 through 6.

At 11 a.m., students in the remedial and enrichment classes and those in the recreation program convene at Clark's cafeteria for lunch. After lunch, they switch places—those on the playground attend afternoon classes; those who were in class all morning go across the street for recreational activities.

UPCS students are eager to talk to visitors and pose for photographs. They're used to all the attention. Scores of reporters and high-profile policymakers like former U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley, former Massachusetts Gov. Paul Cellucci, U.S. Sens. Ted Kennedy and John F. Kerry, and state Sen. Thomas Birmingham have all visited.

One reason so much attention has been paid to UPCS is its standout principal Donna Rodrigues. A native of Main South, she was a teacher in Worcester schools for 34 years and taught many of the parents of today's UPCS students. Rodrigues has been part of the school's planning process from the beginning. Clark President John Bassett, has called her "heroic." Sophomore Freddie Ortiz, who has a part-time summer job manning the front desk at UPCS, says, "Mrs. Rodrigues is like a mother. She always tries to help you out."

One foundation of UPCS is high expectations for all students. Indeed, students attend school for an extended day, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with hour-and-a-half classes and a minimum of two hours of homework

every night. “We prepare them not only for getting into college but what to expect once they get there,” says social science and history teacher Ricci Hall. “We’re preparing them psychologically, emotionally and academically. All of our kids expect to go to college. Some expect to aim higher than Clark. Some know they will have to aim at less demanding schools. But all of them plan to go.”

In fewer than five years, the University Park Campus School has had a profound impact on Main South. Sure, a lot of kids still need summer remedial help, and gang violence still touches the neighborhood.

But that just “makes it all the more poignant when these kids come here every day,” says Hall, noting that many of them stay after dismissal to study at the school’s homework center. “When you see kids walking home at four o’clock with backpacks on their backs, it makes you realize how much has changed here,” says Hall. “It has become the norm that these students see themselves working toward a very important goal—going to college.”

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Rocket Science and Hot Potatoes

In June, a group of Essex, Vt., high school students joined University of Vermont associate professor of mechanical engineering Tony Keller on the university campus to launch a rocket at the speed of sound and conduct an engine burn test. Other teams of high school students and teachers from Vermont and upstate New York joined UVM scientists to develop hands-on projects related to crime scene investigation; pest problems in greenhouse crops; dairy chemistry; molecular genetics; and creating a tabletop model of a red blood cell’s motion through a capillary.

The teams left UVM at the end of June with the equipment and supplies necessary to complete the projects at their high school facilities during the 2001-2002 academic year. They return to UVM in

March to present their research. The projects were developed through the Vermont Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research/Hughes Endeavor for Life Science Excellence summer outreach program.

Meanwhile, high school students participating in the Math-Science Upward Bound program at the University of Maine this past summer got first-hand experience with agricultural field research. Working with UMaine entomologist Randall Alford, the students monitored plots of potatoes for Colorado potato beetle infestations. Some plots were treated with a natural plant product as an alternative to synthetic insecticides; one was left untreated. Students tracked the movement of beetles into their plots and beetle densities at each life stage.

Teacher Salaries

Average pay for New England teachers did not grow at all during the 1990s, according to an analysis of federal data by the Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies. In fact, in five of the six states, average teacher salaries actually declined after accounting for inflation. Only Vermont teachers experienced a modest average salary increase—one half of 1 percent over eight years. Teacher pay is heavily determined by number of years of work experience. So if a large number of highly paid teacher retired over the 1990s and were replaced by lower-paid entry level teachers, teacher wage scales may have increased while the average salaries of all teachers declined. But further data reveal that entry-level pay for teachers actually declined in New Hampshire and grew by an average of just 5 percent in the remaining states.

Annual Salaries of Elementary and Secondary School Teachers, 1990-91 to 1998-99, (Constant 1998-99 dollars)

Average Salary	1990-91	1998-99	Absolute Change	Relative Change
Connecticut	\$53,323	\$50,227	(\$3,096)	-5.8%
Maine	\$35,056	\$34,906	(\$150)	-0.4%
Massachusetts	\$44,343	\$44,051	(\$292)	-0.7%
New Hampshire	\$38,425	\$37,405	(\$1,020)	-2.7%
Rhode Island	\$46,960	\$46,286	(\$674)	-1.4%
Vermont	\$36,509	\$36,697	\$188	0.5%

Beginning Salary	1990-91	1998-99	Absolute Change	Relative Change
Connecticut	\$31,101	\$31,391	\$290	0.9%
Maine	\$23,195	\$24,962	\$1,767	7.6%
Massachusetts	\$26,785	\$28,005	\$1,220	4.6%
New Hampshire	\$25,354	\$24,406	(\$948)	-3.7%
Rhode Island	\$25,664	\$26,237	\$573	2.2%
Vermont	\$22,742	\$25,435	\$2,693	11.8%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics.