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Cincinnati's Oyer Elementary finds winning formula to

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and voters were rejecting higher tax levies.

Perhaps nowhere was that decline felt more than Oyler Elementary, tucked into Lower Price Hill, a poverty-stricken industrial neighborhood along the Ohio River built in the 1800s as factory housing by German immigrants.

More than 80 percent of Oyler's students never made it to tenth grade. It's parents weren't involved, and resources were scarce.



Caitlin Jacob, left, a college access advisor, helps Seante Flores, right, a senior at Oyler Academy, with college choices. Flores will be the first of her 17 siblings to attend college. (By Michael Clevenger, The Courier-Journal) April 7, 2011



“The teachers were working hard, but achievement was going down,” said Principal Craig Hockenberry, who has led the school for 13 years. “We asked, ‘What was it going to take to get kids to graduate?’ We knew something else had to be done.”

Today, Oyler has become a model of the “Community Schools” movement that tackles low achievement by bringing in a host of community-service providers.

School officials say the efforts have paid off for the 700 students at Oyler, which has been a K-12 school since 2005.

In 2010, the high school graduated 82 percent of students, with 32 percent becoming the first in their family to go to college. Daily attendance has risen to 94 percent.

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disappeared.

“We still have kids who don't make it. It's still not easy to succeed,” Hockenberry said.

About 92 percent of kids are on subsidized lunch, 112 children are homeless, 190 have disabilities and many come and go during the year. The students come from families with problems ranging from parents in prison to substance abuse to chronic unemployment.

Darlene Kamine, director of Cincinnati's Community Learning Center Institute, said Oylar doesn't require major donors to provide the services they offer — instead they work by persuading existing providers to bring their offices and services into the school.

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