

Edition: U.S.



P.G. Sittenfeld

Cincinnati City Councilman

What New York Sees In Cincinnati

Posted: 07/29/2013 10:10 am

For the candidates hoping to be mayor of New York City, the campaign trail has led to unexpected destinations. Specifically, in recent months, most of the strongest candidates have visited Cincinnati.

Christine Quinn has made the trip. As has Bill Thompson. Bill de Blasio's been here. John Liu, too. Had Anthony Weiner entered the race earlier, a swing through Cincinnati might well have been on his agenda.

And it's not just political heavyweights who have paid us a visit. Leadership from the Partnership for New York City business coalition, the United Federation of Teachers, and Trinity Wall Street Church have all journeyed to Cincinnati.

All of which begs the question: What's happening here?

The answer: a model of educational innovation yielding big results, and catching the country's attention.

What the mayoral candidates have come to see is our Community Learning Center Initiative. A little more than a decade ago, voters passed a bond levy making possible the rebuilding or renovating of every public school in the district. The promise to taxpayers was that the facilities would be much more than just traditional academic settings during traditional school hours. Schools, typically dormant after-hours and on weekends, would be central to each neighborhood's revitalization.

Indeed, these buildings have grown into around-the-clock community centers: populated by partnerships providing health care, tutoring, social services, recreational opportunities, and other

resources for students and their families, and all residents of the surrounding neighborhood.

Community partner organizations, which now number more than 600 - ranging from the YMCA to our Freestore Foodbank to GED programming - use the schools as a setting to better serve their target constituents. The space is provided free-of-charge. Each partner's programming is financially self-sustaining so that no school district dollars are needed.

In a series this year, the [national radio program Marketplace has focused on Oyler School](#), one of Cincinnati's most robust community learning centers. The community learning center model has transformed outcomes. Oyler - historically suffering some of the highest poverty, illiteracy, teen pregnancy, incarceration, and drop-out rates nationally - has morphed into an extraordinarily different place.

On-site services include a health center, eye and dental clinics, nutritional and athletic resources, and an early childhood program.

These providers have direct access not only to the students, but also to their families. Across the district, immunization rates, dental screenings, and asthma identification have all risen by double-digit percentages.

As for academic achievement?

Before the initiation of the community learning center model, Cincinnati Public School's languished in a status of "Academic Emergency" on the Ohio Department of Education's official assessment. A decade later, Cincinnati is the highest-rated urban district in the entire state. Our Academic Performance Index has jumped from 57.3 to 88.5.

A tribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of this model is its bipartisan appeal. A recent proposal in the Ohio Legislature to expand the model statewide was co-sponsored by a Democrat and a Tea Party Republican.

In New York, an inevitable focus will continue to address educational goals. Cincinnati can't tell the Big Apple what to do, but we can tell you what's worked - and worked powerfully - for us. And we think you should be heartened that so many mayoral contenders are learning about linking schools and communities toward mutually beneficial ends.

New York hasn't paid this much attention to Cincinnati since our Reds whopped the Yankees in the 1976 World Series. Now that we've captured Gotham's attention again, we must be onto something good.
