

At Oyler School, Early Learning is Part of Community-Based Approach

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On September 13, I visited the Oyler School in Cincinnati, a pre-K-12 public school that serves a high-poverty community known as the Urban Appalachian, made up of families who migrated to Ohio from Kentucky and West Virginia after World War II, looking for work. Oyler is a “[community learning center](#),” meaning the school is a hub for community activities as well as for educational and social services such as tutoring, college mentoring, adult education and health care. Oyler also houses an early learning center for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

My tour of Oyler was organized by the [Coalition for Community Schools](#). While Oyler has been a community learning center since 2004, this year it moved into a brand new building. The transition is part of a [Cincinnati Public Schools](#) initiative to transform every school into a community learning center. As part of the program, several schools have been or will be remodeled to provide additional space for community meeting rooms and other joint use areas such as gyms, health facilities, computer labs and preschools.

Oyler is equipped with health, dental and vision clinics; a brand new auditorium; and space for mental health counselors to meet with children and families. The school’s Schiff Early Learning Center serves neighborhood children who are expected to enroll in Oyler for kindergarten, provided they still live in the school’s attendance zone. The center is a new addition to the school this year. Principal Craig Hockenberry sees the Schiff Center as a tool for ensuring that future students are better prepared—cognitively and developmentally—to enter kindergarten, as well as for getting parents involved earlier in their children’s education. The center offers a parenting program that focuses on teaching parents the importance of speaking and reading to their young children. The center also partners with Every Child Succeeds, a home visiting program that helps parents create stimulating, nurturing environments for infants. For the Oyler School, the early learning center is more than just an add-on. Schiff Center staff and pre-K-1 teachers plan and work collaboratively. This year the Schiff Center received the highest rating on Ohio’s Quality Rating & Improvement System.

Since becoming a pre-K-12 community learning center, Oyler students have scored better on the state's achievement tests. In 2006 Oyler was in "academic emergency" based on the state's report card system, but in 2011 it was categorized as demonstrating "continuous improvement."

The Oyler School was recently featured on [NPR's Marketplace](#), as part of journalist Amy Scott's year-long report on whether Oyler's broad-based approach to anti-poverty work will be successful for children. We look forward to tracking Oyler's development over time.