



Oyler making impact on the community since 1854



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One endearing touch at Oyler School in Lower Price Hill is a rooftop statue of a girl reading a book. Enquirer file

By Jeff Suess

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The spotlight has been shining on Oyler School recently.

Last fall, the school moved back into its 82-year-old building at 2121 Hatmaker St. in Lower Price Hill after \$21 million of much-needed renovations.

Education leaders across the country have come to check out the school's Community Learning Center, which offers school programs and social services for students and has become a hub for the neighborhood's mostly low-income urban Appalachian community.

Oyler is one of 34 Community Learning Centers in Cincinnati Public Schools, though it has garnered the most attention.

American Public Media's radio show "Marketplace" is running a yearlong series, "One School, One Year," following the school's approach to tackling poverty as well as test scores. Officials in New York have announced replicating the CPS model in schools statewide, based largely on their visits to Oyler.

The attention has been focused on how the school has transformed to address issues of the community beyond the three Rs. But Oyler School has been serving its community for a long time, dating to about 1854.



G. W. OYLER,
Principal of Twenty-first District School.

School named for its longtime principal

That was the year George W. Oyler came to Cincinnati as a teacher. Born in 1828 in Middletown, he was raised on a farm in Harrison and then attended Farmer's College in College Hill.

Oyler distinguished himself as an educator and became supervisor of five schools in Storrs Township, now known as Lower Price Hill.

In 1872, the five schools were consolidated in one location, a schoolhouse with 12 classrooms on the site of the current Oyler School. G.W. Oyler was made principal with a yearly salary of \$1,800. The new school was called Storrs, but when the township was annexed to Cincinnati in 1870 it became known as 21st District School.

After 47 years of teaching in the district, most of them as principal, Oyler was forced to retire in June 1901 by the Board of Education. Superintendent Richard Boone had recommended that several principals, including Oyler, be "retired." More than 1,500 parents signed a petition demanding that the board retain Oyler, to no avail.

At their next meeting, the board renamed 21st District School after its popular principal. "This was in compliment to him because of his long service in that school," The Enquirer reported.

Oyler died in 1916 at age 88 and was buried in Spring Grove Cemetery.

Adapting to the needs of the community

A fire in 1907 nearly destroyed the school building, but it was rebuilt, with kindergarten added as well as rooms for domestic science and manual arts like woodworking and sewing.

Over the years the school has adapted its programs to the population's needs.

By 1931, though, the original schoolhouse was inadequate and worn out. A new structure, designed by the architectural firm Samuel Hannaford & Sons, was built on that same location.

The brick building blends Italian Romanesque with art deco in the terra cotta trim and ornate door and window treatments. One endearing touch is a couple of statues, a boy and a girl, each nestled atop the roof reading a book.

The school contained an auditorium, two gyms and rooftop playgrounds because there wasn't enough space on the ground.

Demonstrating a move toward practical arts, there were shops for printing, metal and woodworking, and mechanical and electrical studies.

A decade ago, Oyler was a K-8 school in a neighborhood rife with drugs and crime. The building was deteriorating. The bricks buckled, the statues were crumbling. Oyler students rarely went on to finish high school, much less college.

Since then, Principal Craig Hockenberry and the school board have turned things around.

In 2004, Oyler was one of the first CPS schools to become a Community Learning Center.

To combat the obstacles of poverty, the school offers students free meals, a health clinic and the new OneSight Vision Center – the first of its kind in the country.

High school was added, and the Oyler Hatmakers started playing varsity sports.

Having opened the Schiff Early Learning Center, Oyler now reaches kids from pre-K to 12th grade.

The class of 2012 graduated 36 of 38 seniors, and all were accepted to college.

Oyler School is still making an impact on the community it has served since its namesake started teaching there more than 150 years ago.

Have an idea for Did You Know? Contact Jeff Suess at 513-768-8462 or jsuess@enquirer.com.