



Take a lesson on student success

June 4, 2007

Just down the street from incoming Detroit Public School Superintendent Connie Calloway's midtown office is a bold little charter school known as University Preparatory Academy.

Sometime early in her tenure, she ought to make a point to visit -- and she ought to take the entire Detroit Board of Education with her.

While charter schools are seen as enemy territory for DPS -- one source of the district's annual student exodus -- UPA is a cut above the rest, a school worth paying close attention to. In the seven years since it opened, it has become an incubator for the sorts of academic successes that some say are impossible to realize with students from troubled urban backgrounds.

Ninety percent of UPA's first eligible graduation class is set to receive a diploma -- and, more important, to go on to some form of higher learning. Only three high schools within DPS can boast similar success -- a fact that you might think would attract curious eyes from the school district.

If UPA can create an atmosphere of high learning expectation and achievement among average students through small class sizes and personalized curriculum, perhaps DPS can, too. They are, after all, educating the same population.

The other point for DPS officials to remember is this: You don't have to agree with the principle of charter schools to learn something from their accomplishments. There's enough going on at UPA to have gotten the attention of public school delegations from such places as St. Louis, Pittsburgh and Indianapolis. They've all come to UPA's sparkling campus of glass buildings looking for clues about urban education, even little pieces of what's working there that they might replicate.

New visitors come every other week, says UPA's cofounder and superintendent, Doug Ross. The one bureaucracy that seems uninterested is the closest: DPS.

So the school's door, Ross says, is especially open to Dr. Calloway and the DPS board. In fact, that was one of the principal ideas behind the school: to figure out what works in urban education and offer it back to the city's public schools.

It's well past time that DPS said yes to the possibility that there are valuable things to be learned from "the other side."

Copyright © 2007 Detroit Free Press Inc.

▪