



THE UNITED STATES' EXPERIENCE

TITLE:

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP ENGINEERS SUCCESS FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN IMPOVERISHED NEIGHBORHOOD

GENERAL INFORMATION

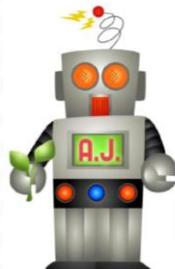
Country: United States of America

Coordinating Institution: A. J. Whittenberg Elementary School of Engineering

Other institutions involved: Fluor, GE, Michelin, Hubbell Lighting, Salvation Army

Duration of the experience: August 2010 – present

Webpage: www.greenville.k12.sc.us/ajw



A. J. Whittenberg Elementary
School of Engineering

1) Objectives

The vision behind A. J. Whittenberg Elementary School of Engineering (AJW) was to create a true public-private partnership that could leap-frog the current educational challenges and deliver breakthrough results for 21st Century learners. Dr. Phinnize J. Fisher, who was superintendent of Greenville County Schools when AJW opened in the fall of 2010, sought to leverage the tremendous engineering resources in the Upstate of South Carolina to ignite a lifelong thirst for learning among students of all backgrounds. Anchored by major international companies such as Fluor, GE, Michelin and Hubbell Lighting, the Upstate of SC has the largest concentration of engineers per capita of anywhere in the United States. In order to succeed, those companies need to attract a talented, educated workforce. The objective of AJW is to pair this business

imperative with urban planning and public educational goals to break the cycle of poverty for children in the school's urban location and drive sustainable economic growth for the region as a whole. Children receive a world-class education; business receives a well-educated, ready workforce and customer base for the next generation; and, government and community leaders grow the economic base and social fabric of the region. The perfect win-win-win.

2) Relevance

A. J. Whittenberg Elementary School of Engineering is a public school in Greenville County. Approximately one-third of its student body comes from a one-mile radius around the school. This highly distressed urban area is home to rampant poverty, unemployment, single parent or non-traditional parent households and the highest levels of gang activity in the county. The majority of its students; however, choose to come to AJW from outside of this West Greenville neighborhood. Until the school district moved to a lottery system for the 2014-15 school year, parents would literally camp out for days on end to register their children. The school has a waiting list of more than 100 students – almost 20% of its capacity – at any given time. AJW students are engaged with real-world experts and hands-on engineering projects that teach them to hone their analytical, problem-solving, and technology skills. This focus, coupled with a team-work approach and high degree of rigor equips students with the 21st Century skills needed for success and economic growth. For the students in its attendance neighborhood, the AJW experience offers the best possible chance to break the cycle of poverty and set them on a path to independence and self-reliance.

3) Concrete activities and actions

Long before A. J. Whittenberg opened, the principal and director of curriculum were already in place. The curriculum director worked for more than a year to create and source the school's unique engineering-focused curriculum. The principal scoured the district and beyond for the highest quality teachers with strong technology skills and creativity. Intense professional development for teachers helps to assure the success of the school's Engineering Approach, which guides all academic activities. A dedicated program director is the focal point for the school's external relationships. This role seeks to pair educational needs with available resources of all kinds. Business partners are actively courted and given visibility of program results. Financial funding is program specific; and, in-kind and volunteer resources are highly valued. AJW shares its campus with a Ray and Joan Kroc Salvation Army Community Center. Through this Kroc Center, students receive lessons in soccer, tennis, swimming, golf, and dance as part of the school day and at no cost to families. In turn, Kroc uses school facilities for evening adult education classes. Neighborhood churches provide mentors and tutors for students in need. AJW was the home base for the City of Greenville Livability Educator. This position, employed by the city, created many of the school's environmentally-focused programs.

4) Achievements and results

A. J. Whittenberg's first school report card, issued by the U.S. government as part of the Federal Accountability Act, received the only perfect "A-100" in the entire district. AJW has maintained that level of excellence each year since. It consistently earns an "A" on federal rankings and the highest state ranking possible, Palmetto Gold for achievement. Well over 90 percent of students score at or above benchmarks in all core subjects. Beyond these standard measures, AJW continues to receive many accolades. Its fourth grade FIRST Lego Robotics League team was invited to compete internationally against students up to age 16 from 35 other countries. In competition against students several years older, another robotics team won a slot to compete at the SC State Championship. AJW teachers have been honored with the nationally recognized Milken Award, Fulbright International Scholarships and a slot at Space Camp for Educators in Huntsville, Alabama. The school has also received a variety of certifications and grants for its healthy living and sustainability efforts including the Champions of the Environment Award, LiveWell Greenville certification, Green Steps certification and more.

5) Sustainability

Now in its fifth year, A. J. Whittenberg Elementary continues to welcome children of all backgrounds and deliver impressive results. The school takes a page from the business world in its approach to planning for long term success. Sustainability comes from constant examination of its curriculum and programs paired with a willingness to change, improve and adjust in order to maintain a climate of continuous improvement. While programs are under a rolling review, costs are likewise under constant scrutiny. Any opportunity to reuse, repurpose or re-source to stretch program dollars is embraced. This cost conscious approach has stretched academic-year-only programs into summer activities, further driving success. The school is also constantly forming new partnerships and connections with the community. This growing network breathes additional life into existing and new programs and activities.

6) Lessons learned

The success of A. J. Whittenberg proves that the leaders and visionaries behind the project got a lot of things right. The ability to have the administrative team of the school on board well in advance of the opening, with time and resources to plan, is crucial to success. Likewise, the public-private partnerships that engage public education with private industry, government agencies, NGOs, and faith-based resources are vital. The proverb is true – it takes a village to raise a child (well). The combination of public education, business partnerships and community involvement is a winning reality that is paying dividends for students and the community as a whole. Another key to the success was the ability to ramp up the student population. By opening with only pre-kindergarten through second grade, the school was able to create a distinct culture and climate that supports the problem-based, engineering curriculum and high

technology integration. Adding a grade each year allowed for adjustment and learning both in technology deployment and curriculum development. In addition to developing a technology deployment plan, equal wait should also be given to the refresh and sustainability of this technology. Teaching children to correctly use one-for-one technology can only go so far. Technology changes, warranties expire. A refresh plan, complete with funding mechanisms are necessary for sustained success.

7) Capacity for the exchange of this experience

Cooperation modality	Cooperation modalities the institution can provide to others	The institution may be able to provide this cooperation to others by
Information Sharing	X	On-going
Conference Calls	X	On-going
Technical and Experts Visits	X	Mid-September through April, except for major US holiday periods.

8) Author of this story

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9) Key persons involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the experience

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The Signs of Competitiveness in the Americas Report 2014 is a product developed by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as RIAC Chair Pro Tempore 2014 and the OAS as RIAC Technical Secretariat with contributions received by the countries in the region, multilateral and academic institutions, and world-renowned experts.

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