

Leisy

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October 5, 2015

The Learning Community: Making a Difference

Before The Learning Community existed, Ms. Meg O’Leary and Ms. Sarah Friedman worked in six different elementary schools in Providence. According to Ms. Meg O’ Leary, they saw “some good teaching” and “some bad teaching.” Then, O’Leary said in an interview, they started thinking about only having one school to worry about.

If they had one school, they would work on building strong teachers. They would also create a program for students that do not speak English. In Mrs. Cheryl Luciano’s interview, she said that both she and Ms. Sarah Friedman worked in an agency called Family Services and one day Friedman told Luciano that they were opening the school and asked if she wanted to join their team. So Mrs. Luciano joined their team. In Mrs. Luciano’s interview she said that she and Ms. Sarah went to every place where they saw kids or families and they handed out flyers and applications. According to an article by Tatiana Pina in a 2004 issue of The Providence Journal, the school would serve children from Central Falls, Pawtucket and Providence.

By 2001, O’Leary wrote a Charter School Application. In that application she said that The Learning Community would build the strengths of different students, respecting their cultural backgrounds. This tells me not only that Ms. Meg and Ms. Sarah are very understanding of where each student comes from, but that they also respect where students come from. O’Leary also said that they would provide support services for those who don't speak English. She included that The Learning Community would practice a family engagement strategy that was understandable and a model for all schools in the area.

In the Mission Statement that was written around the time the school was started, it said that The Learning Community would “believe that literacy empowers each individual” which tells me that a big part of the school would be writing and reading even with students that don't speak English. The Learning Community was also planned as a place where teachers would have a voice too. Ms. Meg and Ms. Sarah were at schools where teachers didn't have a voice, where the government told them what to do. In Ms. Luciano's interview she said that the school started to make a difference and give kids a better education by being a laboratory for strong teachers.

In the beginning, Ms. Meg and Ms. Sarah didn't think if the school was worth the money, or if it was going to be worth the sacrifice. They thought about making the school work, and making it a success. The school started in the Pawtucket YMCA building. As Ms. Sena said in her interview, at the YMCA they were “like a family, everyone was close, and tight.” They had to share rooms and at the end of the day and they had to pack every single thing they owned for the next day because they shared rooms with others at the YMCA. Around 2005, O'Leary and Friedman bought a building to move the school into. The building was located at 21 Lincoln Ave. in Central Falls, Rhode Island.

When the leaders started to think about the name for the school, they mostly thought about what they were doing. The teachers were learning, the staff was learning, the secretary was learning, Ms. Meg and Ms. Sarah were learning, the families were learning and the students were learning. So they named the school The Learning Community, since it was a place where everyone was learning.

Today in 2015, the school has exceeded Ms. Meg and Ms. Sarah's plans. They had planned for the school to be K-6 but now it is K-8, sending kids fully prepared for high school.

The school is a learning community that doesn't just involve the students, but also the teachers and families of each and every student.