A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

Standing tall and shouting our praise!

By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that’s not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God’s grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

I’ve reflected here before on the need to be faithful, to stand here where God has called us in Oxford Circle. God calls us to faithfulness but he brings the increase. The verses and translation above fit with my reflections lately, the way God is bringing an increase above and beyond what we could imagine for Oxford Circle, opening doors to new and amazing opportunities.

This fall, we are in the midst of implementing plans approved by the Philadelphia School District with Carnell Elementary School’s Redesign Team. The team is led by the School Principal and includes School Teachers, Leaders, Parent Representatives, and Oxford Circle CCDA. The school is transitioning to project-based learning and our part is the development of a Family Resource Center that will be housed on-site at the school. If we are able to implement the plan outlined by the Redesign Team, we will impact the education and lives of 1000 elementary students and their families annually! The school currently is in the bottom 25% of schools in Philadelphia but the bold vision of the Redesign Team calls for it to become the premier project-based learning school in Philadelphia.

As one of our board members said, “How does a faith-based organization with a mission statement like ours get an invitation from the School District to provide services on-site?” While I think it is in part due to the level of need in the School District, it is also due to the miraculous and amazing ways that God has and continues to open doors for us. This includes a School Principal and Leadership Team that seeks out and has an open door to the community and has spent countless hours going above and beyond to do a “new thing”. Please join us in “standing tall and shouting our praise” at the way God has and continues to work. Also please pray with us that this plan would bear fruit, that the School Leaders and Teachers would be strengthened and encouraged and that the children of Oxford Circle would receive the high quality education they deserve.
As a supporter of OCCCDA, you may have heard us mention our local public elementary school, Carneill, as a prayer request, and our recent partnership with them in planning a successful redesign proposal. Starting this year, Carnell is implementing an exciting and innovative educational approach called Project-Based Learning. As we were planning and dreaming about redesign last year, we started to realize that any educational approach alone, albeit an innovative one, would have limited success if the social and spiritual challenges holding families back were not also addressed.

As a result of God’s answers to many prayers, Carnell has been incredibly open to partnering with OCCCDA and has invited OCCCDA to take the lead in developing a Family Resource Center in the school!

Many children and families at Carnell face non-academic barriers that become distractions to learning for the students and sometimes their entire class. The Carnell Family Resource Center (CFRC) will partner with children, their families, teachers and community partners to identify these barriers and reduce their impact on the family and the classroom. In addition, as a church community, we can be specifically praying for the families that walk through the doors of the CFRC. This is a unique opportunity!

We believe that true restoration of neighborhoods includes quality educational opportunities for all children regardless of their zip code or life circumstances. In an era of decreased educational spending, schools need to be increasingly creative in how they service their students. OCCCDA sees this partnership to be a true community response to the needs that have arisen in our school.

To date, there is a designated space within Carnell Elementary School, although the room needs some repairs to function as a resource center. The School District began renovating on Oct. 19, the same day we received a grant from the Clemens Family Foundation to cover space enhancements, the furniture and technology to make this space a fabulous resource for families!

We plan for the Family Resource Center to be operational in November. In the meantime, OCCCDA is working with coordinator, Jen Leaman, and Temple MSW intern, Bianca Morales, to establish relationships with families and develop organizational structure for the CFRC.

Summer Campers Paint Mural at Carnell Elementary

This summer Carnell Elementary partnered with OCCCDA in painting a mural for the school. The mural is meant to depict Project based learning and the opportunities for growth it gives students. All the students who participated in painting the mural were excited to be able to put a permanent mark on the school, and finishing it was joyful for everyone. I’m so thankful for the personal opportunity to be a part of designing the mural and instructing the students and cannot wait to see how it continues to affect the community even after this summer.

~Matia Jones, Temple University Art Student