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CLEVELAND SCHOOLS KIDS ARE WINNERS IN JOINT VENTURE



SCOTT SHAW | THE PLAIN DEALER

Students at Entrepreneurship Preparatory School file past what the school calls its Class of 2017. That's the year in which the students could graduate from a four-year college or university.

THOMAS OTT
Plain Dealer Reporter

Cleveland School District and charter-school operator John Zitzner find that the old adage, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em," sometimes works for both sides.

The district, which loses lots of kids to privately run, publicly funded charters, serves as the nonprofit sponsor that Zitzner's Entrepreneurship Preparatory School needs under Ohio law. E Prep, as the business-oriented school is called, is the only charter embraced by the city system.

Cleveland school officials monitor Zitzner's charter in return for a sliver of its state aid. More important, the district can lump E Prep's promising test scores with its own and tout the charter as one of its specialty schools.

What does E Prep get? Credibility. That helps Zitzner raise private money to supplement state aid. The Cleveland and George Gund foundations are among the contributors.

Zitzner, warmly praised by city school officials, says the relationship proves that traditional public schools and charters can work together.

"This is about how we educate our urban kids and send them to college, period," he said.

E Prep borrows practices from East Coast

schools. Its unusual blueprint starts with the school day and calendar. The school operates from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, 11 months a year, breaking from mid-July to mid-August.

The charter opened in August 2006 with the sixth grade and added the seventh last year. It will expand to the eighth grade next year and hopes to start an elementary school in 2009.

E Prep plans to move this summer into leased space at Tyler Village, an arts, technology and education park being developed in a former elevator plant at East 36th Street and Superior Avenue. For now, it's in the ShoreBank building, on East 105th Street near Bratenahl.

The school hammers home a message that not only can its children go to college, they will. To reach that destination, it sets a rigid course.

Students get one hour a day each in reading, writing, mathematics, social studies and science. The last 90 minutes of the day are devoted to enrichment activities like choir, physical education and Boy Scouts.

Business studies will be introduced next year in the eighth grade and will spread to lower grades if children are mastering other subjects, said Zitzner, founder of a software company that he sold to Xerox in 1998.

Last year's state achievement test scores showed

rapid progress. Three-fourths of the sixth-graders passed reading tests, compared with 7 percent on exams administered by the school at the start of More than 60 percent were judged proficient in math, up from 12 percent.

E Prep's 10 teachers, working with electronic "smart boards" instead of chalkboards, use stopwatches to stick to a series of tasks. Children who finish a task early turn to one of the 30 books they must read each year.

The first week of classes is "culture camp," at which students learn a strict code of conduct. Rules include walking to the right, single-file, in the hall and not talking in the cafeteria until a paper red dot on the wall is taken down and replaced with green.

The academic regimen and 11-month, 10-hour-a-day grind are not for every student and family.

E Prep had 215 students last fall; the number now stands at 170. Zitzner and Marshall Emerson III, head of school, acknowledge that retention is a problem. Most students are from Cleveland, but a number of suburbs are represented as well.

Monica Peake, a single mother from Bedford Heights, gives up a lot of time and gas money so her son, Xavier, can attend E Prep. She drives him to and from school each day, more than 30 minutes one way.

Xavier, a seventh-grader who was previously home-schooled, enjoys soccer, swimming and golf. But he must fit them in on weekends or give them up, his mother said.

"His education is the most important thing," said Peake, who heads the school's parents association.

This ambitious plan costs money. E Prep's budget is \$2.6 million a year, but state and federal money total only \$1.8 million. The school raises the other \$800,000.

E Prep spends about \$13,000 per student. The statewide average was \$9,500 in 2006-07, the last year for which information was available. The average in the eight big-city districts was about \$12,250.

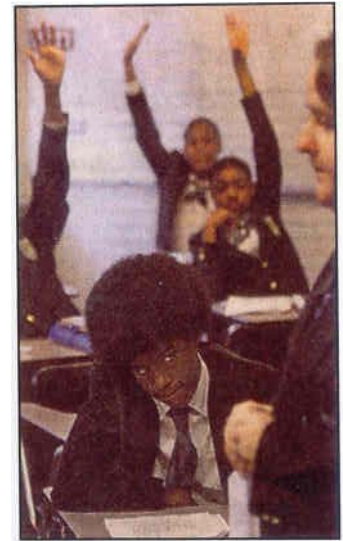
E Prep pays beginning teachers \$45,000 a year, about \$9,000 more than Cleveland pays.

The school is beginning to discuss ways it can work with two other highly regarded Cleveland charters - Citizens' Academy and the Intergenerational School - to save money.

Zitzner said once the three charters cement a relationship, they can talk to the Cleveland schools about further collaboration. Eugene Sanders, the district's chief executive officer, said he will listen.

Cooperation may be the key to charter schools' survival, said Brooke King, executive director of the Intergenerational School. Raising money is exhausting. Charter schools get no local taxes, no money for buildings.

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E Prep seventh-grader Brandon Peck, 13, listens to reading teacher Amy Kenyon



Article Online: http://blog.cleveland.com/metro/2008/04/cleveland_schools_e_prep_chart.html