Improving Elementary Education in North Philadelphia

The Time is Now

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A Unique Opportunity to Provide High-Quality Elementary Education in North Philadelphia

Independence Mission Schools are beacons of hope in their communities. In areas of Philadelphia plagued by deep poverty, our schools — rooted in the Catholic tradition and rich in the joy of learning — provide a valuable educational resource for children of all faiths and for our city.

As you walk through the doors of an IMS school, several things are immediately apparent — the sense of safety and security, the expectation of excellence, the commitment to service and faith, and the sense of purpose for the future. Our network of 15 schools builds on the legacy of Catholic education in Philadelphia, which has nurtured thousands of successful citizens and leaders. It transforms this legacy into the educational opportunity today’s students so desperately need and deserve. Supported by a broad coalition of civic leaders, philanthropists, parents and community members like you, IMS schools provide a high-quality elementary educational option that fosters tomorrow’s leaders in some of the city’s most under-resourced neighborhoods.

The William Harrison School occupies a 2.6 acre city block at 1012 W. Thompson St., one block north of Girard Ave., and one block east of N. Broad St. This facility, closed by the Philadelphia School District in 2012, was made available through the district’s fast track sale process, carrying a $1.365 million purchase price for the land and building. IMS plans to relocate nearby St. Malachy School, moving its 200 current students, and expand offerings for an additional 350 students. In addition to its main function as a high-quality, accessible educational alternative, the new St. Malachy School will afford this neighborhood community-friendly space, incorporating athletic fields and facilities for adult learning and enrichment programs. After a successful bid, IMS conducted a ‘due diligence’ process, and is now developing a full renovation plan and budget. We expect the total cost for both purchase and refurbishment to be approximately $5 million.

We all know these are challenging times for education in the City of Philadelphia. Declining test scores, weekly reports of violence, and ongoing budget cutbacks have impacted students. Coupled with the scarcity of charter school seats, children in our city have too few choices for high-quality education. We have a unique opportunity for the establishment of a 21st century learning environment serving 550 students in the center of North Philadelphia. We invite you to join us in creating a revitalized tomorrow for our city as we embark on the next phase of this ambitious and worthy goal.

SITE:
The Harrison School
1012 W. Thompson St.
Philadelphia

NEIGHBORHOOD:
Yorktown

CAPACITY:
550 elementary school students in grades Pre-K-8

PURCHASE COST:
$1.365 Million

TOTAL PROJECT:
Est. $5 Million

PER STUDENT COST:
less than $10,000
Background

**Independence Mission Schools** has a unique opportunity to provide 550 quality Pre-K-8 seats in one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Philadelphia. The families in this community have limited resources, and even more limited access to quality educational opportunities for their children.

Poverty in the neighborhood surrounding the Harrison School is above 40%, nearly double the national rate of poverty for a family of four. Nevertheless, the community is witnessing substantial new development in close proximity — to the south as Center City expands northward, and to the north and west with new development spurred by Temple University. IMS believes it is time to invest, reinvigorate, and expand the educational resources for our urban population. As a system of independent Catholic schools, IMS can accomplish this without putting additional stress or financial burden on the Philadelphia School District, and for an estimated one-time capital cost of less than $10,000 per student seat.

The proposed acquisition and redevelopment of the Harrison building is consistent with, and ideally complements the mission and strategic direction of IMS. IMS is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to the provision of high-quality Catholic education to children of all faiths from high poverty, under-resourced neighborhoods in the city of Philadelphia. IMS currently operates 15 elementary schools across the city, educating approximately 4,300 students. All of the IMS schools are uniquely tied to the local communities they serve, and deliver quality academic outcomes to the children of those communities. The IMS mission is to sustain and enhance these schools, to make them affordable for all children, and to deliver a high-quality educational experience for each of our students.

**TIME TO INVEST:** The poverty level of the population in the neighborhood surrounding the Harrison School is above **40%**.

Across the city there are **12,000** high-quality Pre-K seats, and **100,000** children **under the age of 5.**
St. Malachy School

Among the schools IMS operates is St. Malachy School, located less than two blocks north of the Harrison building, at 1419 North 11th Street. With a proud history as a parochial Catholic school dating from 1861, this now independent, Catholic school serves 200 children. The student body is 97% African-American and only 4% Catholic.

St. Malachy School’s current facility is antiquated and cannot be expanded. The school building, more than 150 years old, is no longer fit for its purpose, with classrooms in the basement, and aging cramped spaces throughout. Without the ability to expand and modernize, IMS is not able to enhance the school’s academic platform to provide the high-quality education that is our primary objective. Moving to another facility is imperative for the future of the current students of St. Malachy School as well as the hundreds of other children in the neighborhood without a high-quality educational alternative. The relocation of the students of St. Malachy to the Harrison building could be accomplished easily and seamlessly. For St. Malachy and the broader community, the opportunity to move to the Harrison building is ideal, given its close proximity and fitness for a state of the art elementary school. Relocation would enable IMS to preserve an important anchor in the community, while at the same time offering new opportunities for quality educational advancement.

Importantly, the relocation of St. Malachy would more than double the number of students it currently serves. Initial plans for the new facilities would accommodate an additional 350 students, creating a total student population of 550. With upgraded facilities designed to support a 21st century educational environment, we believe many more families in the North Board Street Corridor as well as those who may commute to the area, such as employees of Temple University, will be eager to enroll their children in a re-energized St. Malachy program.

Our experience in the first year of IMS operations (2013-14) and in the first half of recruiting for our second school year, supports the premise of increased enrollment. Under IMS leadership, student enrollment across the 15 schools grew by 7.5%, following seven straight years of decline. We expect enrollment growth this year to exceed that level. The Yorktown neighborhood centered in North Philadelphia is a critical part of the IMS mission, which focuses on under-resourced urban communities. By moving our operations to the Harrison property, we can preserve a longstanding institution and offer reinvigorated educational and community services to many more deserving students.
Our Vision for St. Malachy

Our vision for the new St. Malachy School involves programs the children of St. Malachy deserve and do not now have due to the limitations of the current facility. With the proposed expansion, IMS will add Pre-K programs for 3 and 4 year olds that will help prepare young children to read and embrace mathematical concepts. Early education programs provide a firm foundation for the intellectual, social and emotional growth and development of young minds, and are a core component in our curriculum.

Additionally, the new St. Malachy School will provide:

- increased capacity for differentiated instruction for diverse learning communities
- educational space for fine arts programming
- configurable space to support children with different learning styles and special needs
- substantial technology infrastructure to support our innovative curriculum.

IMS will also offer the highest level of support and advocacy including:

- counseling services within the school, addressing the many needs of the students to keep academic programs on track
- extended day and summer programs, supporting and enhancing academic progress, which cannot be done at the existing St. Malachy School facilities
- ample outdoor space and an expanded physical education program to include playgrounds, ball fields and green space.

EDUCATION TODAY INFLUENCES FUTURE OUTCOMES:

70% of low income African American students in a Pre-K program go on to graduate high school.

Fewer than 20% of students who read below grade level in third grade graduate college.
Accomplishing the Vision

The purchase price for the Harrison facility is $1,365,000. IMS closed on the property June 10, 2014. Our due diligence process included an initial renovation plan, indicating the structure, including the roof and mechanical systems, are sound and the building has sufficient power to support the proposed technology. The boilers will be retrofitted to support a more energy efficient system, and the building will be brought into code compliance. We expect the largest single investment will be replacement of the existing windows.

Our initial cost estimate for refurbishment, including furniture, fixtures, and technology upgrades is $3.5 to $4 million. A total investment of approximately $5 million will provide a high-quality academic environment for approximately 550 students. This equates to a one-time investment of less than $10,000 per student with no further burden on the City or the School District.

The board of directors of IMS has the capability and business experience to undertake the renovation of the Harrison property. This board consists of committed members with substantial experience in the fields of construction, finance, real estate development and facility management. Many of the current IMS board members spearheaded the successful transformation of the St. Martin de Porres School at 2300 West Lehigh Avenue, Philadelphia, PA (“SMDP”). The refurbishments at SMDP included a basement expansion to accommodate a new Pre-K program, renovation of the gymnasium in the school, a new roof, a new heating system, advanced wiring for technology, the addition of smart boards and iPads to the classrooms, and other capital projects. These facility improvements resulted in increased enrollment, solid financial reserves, and most importantly, improved academic quality for the students.

Through its prior efforts at SMDP, the IMS board has proven its ability to refurbish an aging building, invest in new technology, increase enrollment, and create a safe and nurturing elementary school that remains a beacon of hope in an urban community. The acquisition and relocation of St. Malachy School to Harrison will enable IMS, together with the local board of St. Malachy School, and the advocates and staff of St. Malachy, to replicate all of the positive, life-changing results demonstrated at SMDP for the equally deserving students of the St. Malachy learning community.
Conclusion

The City of Philadelphia provides many wonderful opportunities for its citizens. Lacking, however, is the availability of sufficient access to education that develops young learners who think critically, collaborate effectively, and lead boldly in the classroom and community. Our city’s future success is dependent upon quality education for its youngest citizens, and we have a one-time opportunity to help fulfill this fundamental need.

In North Philadelphia, hundreds of families are seeking better opportunities for their children. IMS has the chance—right now—to make an impact that will change the face of education in the city for future generations. With your help we can provide a transformative educational environment for 550 students in the center of North Philadelphia. Purchasing the Harrison school property and creating a 21st century learning center by September 2016 requires your immediate action to meet our children’s needs. Your support today means opportunity for their tomorrow.

Help support this vital project. Contact the Independence Mission Schools Office:

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INDEPENDENCE MISSION SCHOOLS: The St. Malachy School Case Statement

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