

# The Delray Democrat

## **From Cradle to College and Beyond: Village Academy on the Art and Sara Jo Kobacker Campus<sup>1</sup>**

*Compiled by Angela Burns*

“Village, a vision of hope shining for the world to see; Village, a beacon of light guiding our community; Village, where dreams can grow into reality.” These words are the first lines of the chorus of the school song at Village Academy School.

The Head Start to grade 12 Small School Continuum Model at Village Academy is a unique public school model that was designed to provide a continuous educational experience for students in a small-school environment. Village Academy’s current mission grows from its rich history and engaged residents that took action to fight for their community. Local community leaders established a local non-profit chapter of MAD DADS (Men Against Drugs Defending Against Destruction and Social Disorder) in 1992 and initiated a community planning process. In December 1998, a Task Force consisting of residents, community leaders, local philanthropists and city officials was established to begin planning the creation of what is now known as Village Academy. Successful education reform models were researched and youth, family, residents, community-based organizations, school district officials and public agency partners were identified because “It takes a Village to Raise a Child.”

Village Academy School is a community-based, Head Start to grade 12 school located in the southwest poverty-stricken, urban community where the student population is predominantly minority and come from low-income families. Village Academy was established two decades ago to intervene with a local epidemic where approximately 70% of the community children were not graduating from high school. Currently, the school is making every effort to establish a school-wide culture and climate that promotes positive change in the academic achievement of community children, which ensures every student is successful in today’s society.

Village Academy is located within the City of Delray Beach, Florida, which encompasses 16 square miles and has a total population of 69,451 (2019) residents. Data from the 2000 U.S. Census indicates that more than 9,000 individuals reside in the urban community that surrounds the school and the current racial composition of the residents is 73% Black, 13% White, 10% Hispanic, and 4% other. The local community is plagued by the residual effects of poverty as 70% of the Black and Hispanic children under the age of 18 live in poverty, while 71% percent of the Black and Hispanic residents have not completed high school. Village Academy School is a community school that opened in August 2000 and currently has 715 students enrolled. The student population is predominantly minority as 97% of the students are Black, with a substantial Haitian-American population, and 27% of the students are classified as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students. Since 96% of the students qualify for the free or reduced-priced lunch program, Village Academy is classified as a Title I school. The unique aspect of

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Delray Democrat*, February 2021, p.7.

Village Academy is that a grade was added to the school each year from its opening through the 2010-2011 school year when Village Academy became the only K-12 public school in the school district.

The Village Academy currently houses an early learning component, an elementary, a middle and a high school component. The final phase, which will be completed in 2023, calls for building new and expanded facilities on the Historic Carver High School site which will include a Technology and Career College, One Stop Service Center and link them to the educational programming provided at Village Academy. The following will provide a brief description of the current and/or proposed programs for Village Academy Service Center.

### **Village Academy's Core Components**

#### **A. Education Compact**

The plan calls for an Education Compact to be developed between West Atlantic Redevelopment Coalition (WARC) and the School District of Palm Beach County. The purpose of the MOU is to establish the following:

- Community inclusions regarding critical decisions being made regarding Village Academy such as budgets; training; curriculum;
- Improve working conditions for both instructional and non-instructional staff;
- Provide access to additional resources and supports.

#### **B. Shared leadership**

The plan calls for WARC to facilitate the development of a Community Engagement Committee (CEC). CEC is a diverse stakeholder group organized to provide expanded resources and transform Village Center into a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Centers. Membership will include Parents, School District, West Atlantic Redevelopment Coalition, and Labor Union Coalition for Black Student Achievement, and Business Representatives.

#### **C. Early Childhood Development (0-5)**

The first years of life are crucial to building a strong foundation for educational success. The Village model calls for Village Academy Head Start Early Childhood Initiative to ensure that the over 75 children attending will enter kindergarten school-ready. The Village Model calls for low child-to-adult ratio allowing for more one-on-one work, ensuring that students receive the individualized attention they need. Village staff will also continue to encourage strong family involvement, engage parents and caregivers in classroom activities and create consistency between home and school.

Early literacy skills are a primary focus of the Village curriculum. The Village model calls for students to be immersed in vocabulary development, and get to know and explore the world around them through exposure to a range of disciplines—from math, science, and technology to social studies and the arts. Finally, the Village model plan calls for students to participate in fun fitness activities, play sports, and even learn the basics of health and nutrition. From recreation to

reading, the Village Head Start Early Childhood Initiative goal is to turn students into lifelong learners, and reinforce the ultimate goal—college graduation—early and often.

#### **D. Elementary/Middle (K-8)**

Village Academy K-8 Project-based Learning Component prepares our students many that of whom are first-generation, to go to college. By instilling this culture in K-8 component, students will gain knowledge, habits and skills necessary for high school. This will prepare them well for college. The collaboration among parents, community leaders, and advisor/teachers continually reinforces this mindset. Once in high school, students do not spend time deciding if they will go to college, but where they are going.

#### **E. Early College Pathways**

To address under-enrollment in the high school component the plan calls for the creation of the Village Academy Early College Pathway Initiative. This innovative concept will immerse young people from all academic backgrounds in advance classes and work-based learning. The goal is to provide a smooth transition to college and careers in fast growth industries. The program model includes:

- Accelerated pathways for all starting in ninth grade, with course sequences aligned to college-ready standards;
- Designed so that as many students as possible complete a minimum of 12 college credits, including gatekeeper courses in math and English composition: grade 7-13, 9-13, 7-14, and 9-14 designs;
- Dual enrollment options that includes STEM options;
- Aligned with postsecondary programs of study;

#### **F. Afterschool/Weekend Component**

The Village Model recognizes that a critical component of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center is the extended day and extended week programs. Village staff will ensure that the extended day and week programs are designed in alignment and integration with the regular school day. Extended learning programs will consist of the following: Project Base Learning (PBL): Tutorial Component: Physical Fitness; Character Development; Technology/Telecommunications; Art/Music Education;

#### **G. Family Involvement**

The Village Model recognizes parents as important resources, and pays attention to creating a positive, welcoming and supportive school climate and to providing a range of opportunities for parental involvement. CEC will provide programs and services that support parents' capacity to be advocates for their children's success. This sometime means offering programs and services directed toward parent's needs. The plan also recognizes that parents often have the capacity to bring skills and resources to the community school partnership.

**Parenting Program:** Parents will meet for monthly evening Parent Workshops. The Parent Workshop will address the following:

1. Issues related to adolescent alcohol use and abuse;
2. Effective family communication and parental monitoring;
3. Demonstrating engaging activities to allow parents to assist their children with developing personal self-management and social skills;
4. Offering a comprehensive listing of resources to help parents seek out additional information;
5. Employment skills enhancements;
6. Preparing children and families for college;

## **H. Technology and Career College**

Increasing Economic Activity: Enable business development and retention by strengthening the pipeline of skilled talent in the Creative Enterprise Zone (CEZ); partner with education and training providers to assemble a comprehensive array of in-area, high quality certificate or degree-based career training in local demand occupations; secure placement of a One Stop Center in the CEZ; prioritize CRA investments to non-profits providing support services that remove barriers to employment and promote employment retention. The Village Model calls for the development of the [Technology and Career College](#). Technology and Career College seeks to change the way Adult Education is delivered by connecting crucial pieces of the puzzle that are missing from our community, many that are preventing lower-skilled adults from entering and being competitive in the workforce. By aligning and accelerating GED and developmental programs and providing nontraditional students the support they need, the Technology and Career College programs will enable adults to gain the skills required to be successful in the labor market.

## **I. Health and Wellness**

The Village Model calls for developing a Health and Wellness Center. The Center will be actively engaged with the community, providing services, programs, and supports for community members. The community will ensure that physical, mental and social emotional developmental needs are addressed through curriculum, services and programs. Mental and physical health-related barriers to learning are to be removed. Students and families will have information and tools to achieve optimal health. The CEC will ensure continuums of cradle-to-career wrap around services are available to students, their families, and the community at large. These services include:

- Primary Health Care;
- Dental Health Care;
- Mental Health care;

- Case management;
- Workforce Development;’
- Housing

## **INFORMATION ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY**

Drawn to the rich fertile soil and abundant agricultural opportunities, African Americans migrated to South Florida and settled in Delray Beach during the late nineteenth century, attracted to the subtropical climate, coastal living, and tremendous economic opportunity. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a tight-knit, prospering African American community thrived in Delray Beach, fast earning a reputation throughout the South for excellence in sports and education, hard work, strong family values, immutable faith in God, and a sophisticated support system that ensured all residents’ health and well-being. As recently as 45 years ago, Carver High School was the hub of community life in the Southwest Neighborhood of Delray Beach. A robust resident life revolved around the school’s many successes—leading sports teams, unrivaled musical ensembles, and competitive academic achievement that led graduating seniors to college.

Public policy decisions during the 1970’s produced a broad range of unintended consequences, including the closing of the Carver High School for desegregation purposes that initiated a long, slow demise of the Delray Beach’s West Atlantic Neighborhood. The success of disenfranchising this Black neighborhood, along with the Crack Wars of the 80’s, caused this community to experience a significant decline in social and economic capital, increasing social isolation and fragmentation, settling as a blighted concentration of poverty, similar to many other “neighborhoods of color” across America.