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Crispus Attucks students reaching new heights with medical magnet program

AS MUCH AS ANY SCHOOL IN THE CITY, there is history, both solemn and joyful, at the historic building at 1140 Dr. Martin Luther King St. Photographs, artifacts, the architecture itself speaks to the role Crispus Attucks High School played in the development of Indianapolis, a time when proud, highly motivated teachers produced highly motivated students. The once-segregated high school faded from the scene in 1986 when the building became a middle school – but today high school-age stu-

Not that the grade levels mean that much, once students walk through the doors of the 1927 historic landmark.

“Our expectations set the bar for the kids,” said Faulkens. Today, every 6th grader is taking at least one high school course. Every 10th grader is taking at least one college course. Some students are piling up as many as 10 college credits; most end up with three or four.

IPS officials have discovered that the students accept the higher expectations as the norm – untainted by what they

◀ The storied past of Crispus Attucks is being re-energized with the success of the Crispus Attucks Medical Magnet High School. Adding a grade level a year, the building will house seniors once again in two years.

dents are returning to write a new, educationally challenging history for the Indianapolis Public School.

Each day the students walk into Crispus Attucks Medical Magnet High School, where they are facing raised expectations posed by a college preparatory program which challenges young people to achieve beyond their grade level.

“We have very high expectations for students,” said Robert Faulkens, principal of the school which was launched last year for students in grades 6 through 9. The 10th grade was added this year, with two more levels coming in the next two years before the medical magnet program achieves its goal of being a 6-12 program.

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don't know. They also begin to think of "high school" as grades 6 through 12, not 9 through 12.

All medical magnet students are deeply involved with any one of Crispus Attucks's many Indiana University partners – the school of medicine, dentistry, nursing, education, informatics, health and rehabilitation sciences, and others.

The partnership isn't about field trips. It's about real research, real contact with the medical world. "The students are immersed early," Faulkens said. "We try for them to have meaningful, real and sustained experiences, all related to the classroom." For some older students, those experiences are even opening up summer job opportunities.

Forty students are currently helping with two separate studies at the IU School of Dentistry. But the collaborations can be on a smaller scale, as well. A Butler University professor offered her services as a mentor after she learned about the program. As a result, Crispus Attucks students presented research work to the Butler College of Pharmacy Senior Seminar – research which will now be presented to the American College of Pharmacology.

Traditional learning goes on, as well, at Crispus Attucks, although the medical magnet students all study Latin and etymology, which in turn help them with medical terminology courses. Last fall, 28 students and their parents reinforced their classical learning with a trip to Italy and Greece.

A medical magnet program is certainly not for everyone, and some students opt out. Faulkens said those students get help finding a better academic placement. "We want kids to be successful," he said. Those who stay in the program, but slip below standards, get aggressive help as well. "If students are trying, we reward them. We want to take away barriers kids have to make them successful."

Still, the Attucks enrollment has been slightly higher than projected each of its first two years, with just under 600 students in the building this year. For those students, the program is all about increased expectations.

"We provide students the opportunity to see real-life medical professionals at work environments," Faulkens said. "The students can see themselves in these professions."

Faulkens said the program works because of dedicated, highly motivated teachers, and a system which is able to accelerate students as they are ready. The other advantage is "everybody is here because they have chosen to be here."

Those students and their teachers are forging a strong future for the near-Eastside building which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. They feel the history and feel challenged to keep the book open.

"We don't want them to say, 'Attucks has run its course, that it's time to move on'" Faulkens said. "Attucks can be even greater now."

– Bill Brooks