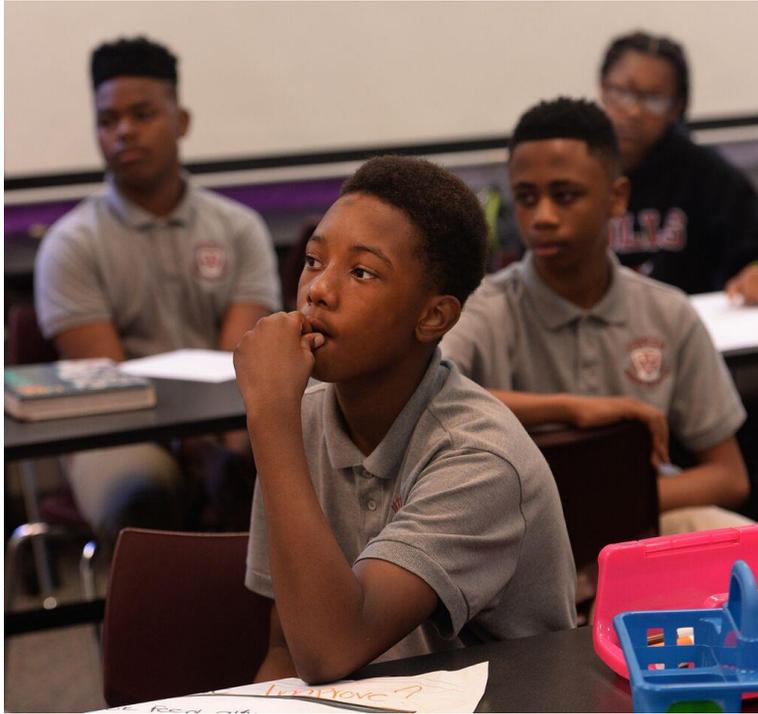




Utopian Academy Sets Academic Records, Moves To New Building



ELLENWOOD -- Utopian Academy for the Arts welcomed scores of new faces to its new building in Ellenwood for the start of the school's fifth academic year.

The new location at 2750 Forrest Parkway offers Utopian Academy room to grow. It has library space, two cafeterias, a gymnasium, a baseball field, and classroom space to accommodate nearly 1,000 students.

The relocation was necessary to ensure the future success and expansion of Utopian Academy as Georgia's premier performing arts public charter middle school.

The school has begun to establish a record of outstanding academic achievement. Utopian scholars made historic double-digit gains on the Georgia Milestones Exams, out-performing their peers in Clayton



County Schools in all subject areas from math to language arts and the state in four subject areas: sixth and eighth grade English/Language Arts, sixth grade math, and eighth grade science.

RECORD PERFORMANCE

Utopian's eighth grade students achieved the greatest gains of all state commission charter schools.

Utopian Superintendent Dr. Artesius Miller said the improved test scores are a direct result of the implementation of new academic standards at the school and the teamwork of faculty, staff, administrators, parents, and scholars.

Under Dr. Miller's leadership, Utopian launched a program last fall to provide more enrichment opportunities, tutoring, and academic intervention for struggling students. In addition, a new principal and instructional coach at Utopian used a bold strategy to improve teaching and learning -- they administered the Milestones Exams to the teachers to help them better prepare lessons and review sessions.

The changes bolstered student confidence. In April, Utopian scholars out-paced their peers at Clayton County Schools by as much as 20 percentage points in every subject area on the Milestones Exams, according to the Georgia Department of Education.

In English/Language Arts, for example, 71.1 percent of sixth graders met or exceeded standards at Utopian compared to 54.6 percent of Clayton County students. In eighth grade, 86.4 percent of Utopian scholars met or exceeded standards compared to 68 percent of district students.

In math, Utopian sixth graders meeting and exceeding standards led their peers 82.9 percent to 60.2 percent; eighth graders led their peers 71.2 percent to 61.7 percent; and seventh graders led by 65.5 percent to 60.9 percent.

Eighth graders also out-performed their district peers on the science exam 77.3 percent to 51 percent and in social studies by 75.8 percent to 66 percent.

"These are strong numbers that let us know that we are headed in the right direction," Superintendent Miller said. "We are so proud of every single person-- our staff and faculty members who have dedicated themselves and have devoted their time and energy; our board members who have made sacrifices to give the school what it needs to be able to have these results; our parents for pushing their kids to work hard; and our scholars for putting forth their best efforts."

The growth in student success was historic for Utopian. Students made significant gains over the previous year, Miller added.

According to preliminary data from the state, eighth graders had pass rates in math that were 21 percentage points higher than the previous year. The double-digit gains continued for eighth graders in English/ language arts, social studies, and science, which saw gains of 29 percent, 38 percent, and 35 percent respectively.



TEAMWORK IN ACTION

In the months before the exam, students took online assessments to measure their progress, including practice Milestones tests. Significant change continued in the weeks before the exam when the board hired Dr. Ron Boykins as principal in March.

"One of the first things that I wanted to do is to give the teachers an opportunity to take the Milestones Exam," Dr. Boykins said. "In a lot of places, the teachers give the test, but they don't take it. We gave our teachers a chance to take it."

"Then we asked ourselves, 'When you look at what is going on in the classrooms, are we preparing our students for success?' The consistent response around the room was that it was not."

Dr. Boykins then had a discussion with faculty about changing the structure of classes to make lessons more engaging and using student data to drive instruction. Other programs were enhanced.

For example, Dr. Boykins enforced the standards for writing across the curriculum to make sure that they were being taught with the same expectations in all classes.

"Before a student could bounce a ball, belt out notes, or do anything in drama, the first thing that they had to do was to write against the standards that were consistent across the school," the principal said.

More changes will be implemented this academic year to continue Utopian's record of student success.

"There are a lot of things we are doing that are good, but we want to drill down to show that it didn't just sound good, that it is effective," Dr. Boykins said.

The school's academic success and extra space is attracting new students. Waitlists for enrollment have been established in most grades, Miller said.

School	Comparison District	Grade	English Language Arts		Mathematics		Science		Social Studies	
			%	district	%	district	%	district	%	district
UTOPIAN ACADEMY FOR THE ARTS CHARTE	CLAYTON COUNTY	6	71.1	54.6	82.9	60.2				
		7	63.2	58.1	65.5	60.9				
		8	86.4	68.0	71.2	61.7	77.3	51.0	75.8	66.0