

Education Row - The Midtown Educational Continuum Description of Educational Plan

May 5, 2014, Revised 4/7/15

Overview

The Midtown Educational Continuum is a plan to help revitalize the City of Harrisburg by bringing an effective, affordable, scalable educational program to the city and also to the surrounding area. The vision is carefully framed to follow educational best practices in a comprehensive, flexible, engaging, and innovative environment by maximizing the educational and accessibility advantages of a continuum that provides for pre-K-through-16 learning in one contiguous city corridor. The plan combines a standards-based-curriculum early childhood center, a standards-based-curriculum public charter school with synchronous and asynchronous components, post-secondary institutions, a strong national mentoring organization, and a public broadcasting center with academic content, to provide for a birth-to-workforce educational program.

The vision has been intentionally built for scalability and replicability, as the problem being addressed is a national issue, and not an issue unique to Harrisburg.



Education Row in Midtown Harrisburg

Partnership

To meet the demands of such a comprehensive educational plan, U-GRO Learning Centres, Commonwealth Connections Academy, HACC, Penn State Harrisburg, Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Capital Region, and WITF have each agreed to partner in the Education Row project. Each of these institutions brings unique and significant strengths to the initiative. GreenWorks Development will foster and facilitate the vision of the continuum.

Structural Components

The Midtown Educational Continuum will be a highly-cooperative, seamless, pre-K-through-16 educational system

that will consist of the following principal elements:

U-GRO Learning Centres will move into a new location in Midtown Harrisburg to provide a standards-based-curriculum pre-kindergarten program for children from ages one through five years. Begun in 1973, U-GRO serves more than 1,400 children in Central Pennsylvania, and is recognized as a Central Pennsylvania leader in pre-K education.



Story Time at U-GRO – Curriculum-Based Pre-K



U-GRO's New Education Row Facility

U-GRO's new facility in Midtown will be comprised of a 9,000-square-foot building with an adjoining newly-built indoor play space and

second-floor-deck outdoor play space. Both play spaces will be shared with Commonwealth Connections Academy's early childhood education programs.

Commonwealth Connections Academy will expand in its current Midtown location in the Campus Square Building and will provide a kindergarten-through-12th-grade program that will engage students in different ways at different stages of their educational careers:

- **Early learners (kindergarten through 2nd grade)** will learn in a stimulating computer-based structured environment that will feel progressive but relatively traditional to most parents.
- **3rd-through-8th graders** will spend a majority of their time in a structured environment, but will spend a small percentage of their 3rd-grade year in



Computer-Based Learning at Commonwealth Connections Academy

independent cyber learning and gradually increase their independent learning percentage in each succeeding year or as their ability permits. Students will be able to spend their independent study time at Commonwealth Connections Academy if they choose, and will have the assistance of instructors in their cyber work if or when that help is needed.

- **9th-through-12th graders** will be encouraged to become independent learners to the fullest extent of their abilities (which will prepare them for college and careers), and will continue to be able to independently study at the school with instructor support when needed.

The K-through-12 educational program described above will be taught in an innovative ***partitioned one-room schoolhouse*** format. Grades K to 2 will be taught in a classroom that contains divided educational pods for different educational levels and subjects, and grades 3 to 5, 6 to 8, and 9 to 12 will have their own flexible, innovative classrooms. In this format, students will be able to progress through subjects and educational levels more fluidly and appropriately than in a more traditional, graded-classroom setting.



Midtown's Campus Square Building – Home of Commonwealth Connections Academy

HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College, has located almost all of its Harrisburg-area trade and technical programs in Midtown, and the presence of these facilities and their programs is an incredible anchor and asset to Education Row. HACC is the largest and the strongest community college in Pennsylvania, and its Midtown I and Midtown II Buildings contain over 200,000 square feet of educational space. HACC's Midtown trade and technical programs are extensive, and a partial list includes:

- Architecture
- Electronic engineering
- Civil engineering
- Computer networking
- Geospatial systems
- Web design
- CAD design
- Plumbing
- Welding
- Building construction
- Carpentry
- Masonry
- HVAC
- Electrical



HACC Midtown II

A significant advantage of HACC's role in Education Row will be that it will allow CCA students to begin their college academic courses or trade certification study while they are still in high school. HACC's presence will also help in allowing CCA students to explore careers early in their high school years.

WITF, Central Pennsylvania's public broadcasting center, will join the partners above to

offer access to its wide portfolio of PBS educational programs, to offer workshops and training to credential the early childhood educators at U-GRO and CCA, and to offer supplemental workshops to help train teachers in the use of PBS-based educational materials. This PBS content will be used as a supplement to the standards-based curriculum, and will serve to bring familiarity, energy, and additional insight to the curriculum. The wide spectrum of PBS educational programs that WITF will bring to the initiative are geared for students from pre-K through high school, and each program is supported by educational games, video clips, and teaching aids to assist teachers in using the content. PBS content is already the most widely-used educational support material nationally, but the systematic use of these materials in a comprehensive educational program is unique.



**Curious George –
Early Childhood STEM Education**

Penn State Harrisburg is exploring the relocation of its Capital Area Early Childhood Training Institute (CAECTI) to buildings across the street from Commonwealth Connections' K-through-12 facility. CAECTI is a community-based professional development and research organization of the School of Behavioral Sciences and Education at Penn State Harrisburg. The purpose of the Institute is to improve the quality of child care for young children by developing, providing, and coordinating a wide variety of professional development opportunities and early childhood services in the South Central Region of the Commonwealth. Relocation to Education Row will make Penn State's CAECTI program more visible and put it into a position to be more effective in its influence on the area's youth.

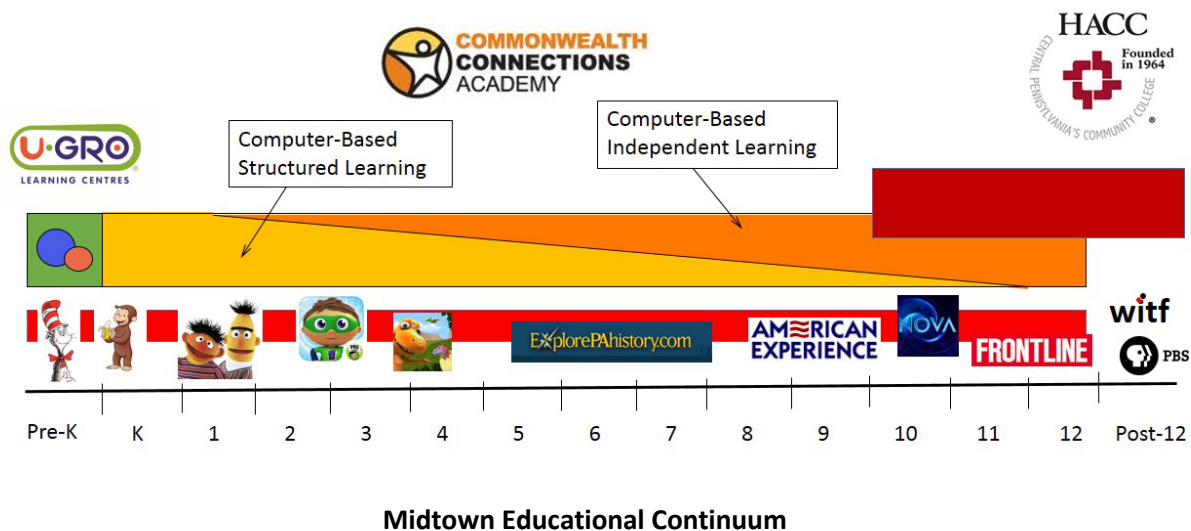
Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Capital Region is evaluating the relocation of its regional headquarters to Education Row in a building immediately south of the new U-GRO facility discussed above. Big Brothers Big Sisters has a strong reputation as an effective mentoring organization both locally and nationwide, and mentoring of youth who are facing adversity can be an absolutely essential component of an effective education. The relocation of the BBBS regional headquarters would put the organization into

an extremely visible facility in a situation that will allow them to become even stronger in their effect on the area's youth.

GreenWorks Development, a Central Pennsylvania real-estate-redevelopment firm, will act as a coordinator and facilities partner for the initiative. GreenWorks has had a fairly significant role in revitalizing the City of Harrisburg since its inception in 2005, and the educational initiative described in this narrative is its highest priority.

Integrated Structure

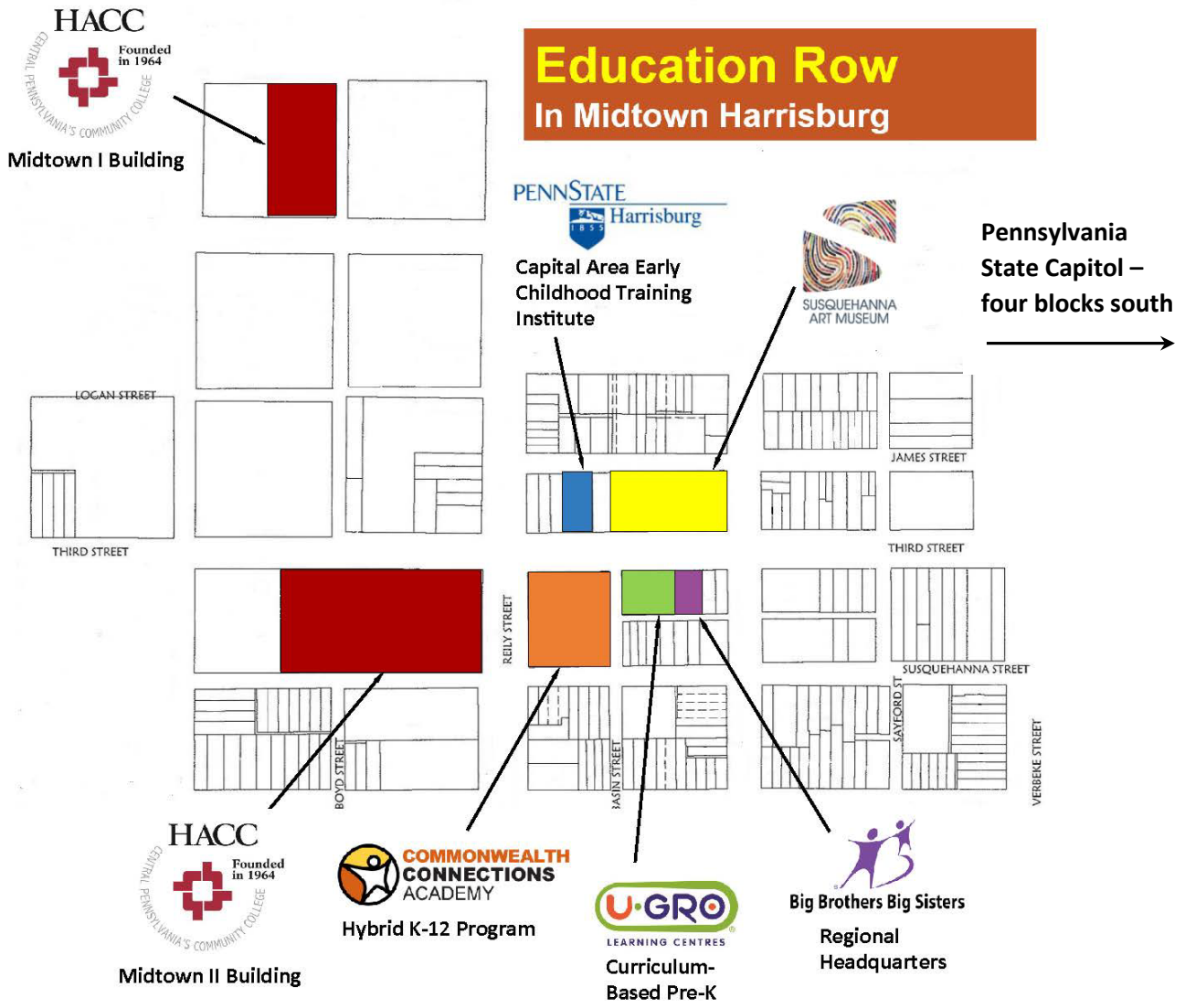
A graphic showing the interconnected structure of the Midtown Educational Continuum is shown in Figure A.



The figure shows a fully-integrated pre-K-through-16 educational structure. In this continuum, a student who begins their early childhood education with U-GRO could transition seamlessly to kindergarten at Commonwealth Connections Academy and, as they progress into their high school career, could begin their college or trade studies at HACC. WITF will be engaged and integrated throughout all educational levels in this system to stimulate and enrich the learning environment, and Big Brothers Big Sisters and Penn State Harrisburg will support the programs and the students and families in them. This continuum provides for a comprehensive pre-K-through-16 educational model that is affordable, effective, and workforce-driven.

Education Row Map

With all of the partners described above in place in Midtown Harrisburg, Education Row promises to be an innovative, effective, and visible educational engine for the region. A map of the area, showing all of the partners discussed above, looks like the following:



Education Row Map

Goals of Education Row

The primary goal of the initiative is to create an extremely effective, affordable, scalable, and replicable educational system that provides for a pre-K-through-16 continuum. The specific goals of the program are as follows:

- 1) **Community Revitalization.** To support, enhance, strengthen, and help foster the educational, cultural, and economic growth the City of Harrisburg and the surrounding community. *All programs within Education Row will be available to students not only in the city of Harrisburg but also in the greater Harrisburg east and west shore suburban areas.*

- 2) **Fun Early-Learning Environment.** To create an environment for all students, but particularly early learners, in which education is fun, exciting, publicly accessible, and welcoming.
 - a. U-GRO will provide a very comfortable, safe, and stimulating environment for entry-level learners from ages one through five years.
 - b. CCA will support the transition from pre-K to early elementary by providing high-quality, face-to-face instruction in an engaging and stimulating cyber-based environment.
 - c. WITF will bring excitement, familiarity, and engagement to all educational levels, but particularly the early-learning levels, of the continuum.
- 3) **Transition to Independent Learners.** To leverage innovative teaching practices and technology to properly transition students from classroom learners to independent learners, and in doing so prepare students for college and workforce success.
- 4) **Flexible Learning Environment.** To create a flexible system in which students can pursue their own particular interests at their own pace while still experiencing a broad educational curriculum. This flexibility both during the school day and in evening and summer programs will allow for accelerated and customized learning.
 - a. Through the independent-learning component of the CCA program, students can gradually customize their education through on-line programs as they progress through middle and high school, and can be accelerated or decelerated through their education as their ability permits.
 - b. By including evening and summer programs as educational reinforcement and customization tools, students will be able to further customize their educations while these evening and summer programs enhance their retention of their primary curriculum.
 - c. By partnering with HACC, CCA will allow its students to begin pursuing the career of their choice while still in high school.
- 5) **Enhance education with PBS content.** To use PBS content as effectively as possible to enrich the standards-based curriculum at all levels of the pre-K-through-16 continuum, embracing the substantial investment in educational research that is part of the production of these programs to motivate students while in class and later as life-long learners.
- 6) **Create rich extracurricular programs.** Arts, athletics, and special-interest club activities will be developed with other Midtown entities such as the new Susquehanna Art Museum to create a culturally-rich educational experience.
- 7) **Scalable Model.** To be fully scalable in the structure and expandability of the program, to enable as many students as possible to benefit from this educational option.
- 8) **Highly Accountable.** To be financially affordable, accessible, and accountable to parents and taxpayers.
- 9) **Successful Model for Similar Communities.** To create a replicable model, so that other communities in Pennsylvania and beyond can adopt similar structures.

Facilities for the Midtown Educational Continuum

Harrisburg Area Community College currently occupies nearly 200,000 square feet of educational space in Midtown Harrisburg at Fourth and Harris Streets (HACC Midtown I) and at Third and Reily Streets (HACC Midtown II), one block distant. Nearly all of its Harrisburg-area trade and technical education is

located in Midtown. Commonwealth Connections Academy currently operates a drop-in center for students in grades 7 through 12 in Midtown's Campus Square Building, across the street from HACC Midtown II. CCA will expand in the building to provide the full K-through-12 hybrid program described above. U-GRO Learning Centres, Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Capital Region, and Penn State Harrisburg will all establish new locations in Midtown, in fully-rehabilitated early-twentieth-century buildings.

Additional space is available in the Midtown area for expansion of these programs, and for the addition of other institutions at all educational levels.

Summary

Innovation in any industry or cultural segment can make that segment healthier and stronger. Education Row is an initiative that is intended to bring as much innovation as possible to education in a new structure made up of some of the area's most experienced, capable institutions. The partnership of HACC, Commonwealth Connections Academy, U-GRO, WITF, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Penn State Harrisburg, GreenWorks Development, and other community-leading institutions can take long steps toward creating a more vibrant, culturally-rich, and economically successful South Central Pennsylvania region.

Information

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