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Community Partnership School

Editorial | Classrooms are filled with high tech and hope

Hail Sister Mary and the Germantown Academy for a partnership that holds hope for Philadelphia's brightest children who are mired in poverty.

The prestigious independent school in Fort Washington and Sister Mary Scullion's Project HOME in North Philadelphia are planning to open an elementary school in the fall of 2006 to prepare children for top-notch private and public prep schools.

The premise underlying their Community Partnership School is blindingly simple: That a child is poor doesn't mean that child can't be smart. Yet it can be a struggle for low-income students to have their academic talents noticed and polished to a high sheen, and for youngsters to get into selective schools that are portals to good colleges and careers.

This school is the brainchild of Germantown Academy. Head of School James Connor sees it as part of a larger effort to prepare gifted, low-income students in the city for successful school careers up through college.

The two main financial donors for the school are the Barra Foundation and the John C. and Chara C. Haas Charitable Trust. They deserve praise for putting their dollars into this promising project.

The academy's contributions include use of its curriculum, teaching method, and application process, as well as administrative oversight.

Project HOME's contribution may surprise some who think of it mainly as a program providing services to the homeless.

Not only will Sister Mary's program offer students social services, it will provide state-of-the-art, high-tech classrooms in its dazzling Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Lab on Judson Street, which opened in January 2004.

At Honickman, each classroom (the school will begin with pre-kindergarten through first grade classes) already has 18 computers. That's plenty for the maximum of 12 students per class.

Rooms also have a SMART Board. That's a giant Internet-connected, interactive white board that is mounted in the front of the classroom like - oh, what's that antique called again? - a chalkboard. The computer mouse is the touch of a child or teacher. It is jaw-

dropping technology that rarely is available in affluent public schools, let alone in primary schools serving low-income kids.

This school's progress next year should be watched closely. If successful, it should serve as a model worth expanding and replicating.

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