



# A SCHOOL WITH A PLAN

*A Downtown charter writes its own script for student success*

No business can survive without a plan. Neither can a school. That's why school districts are required to undergo extensive strategic planning processes.

But most schools' plans don't end up being very strategic, because they are usually trying to serve all the widely varying needs of their community at once.

In contrast, a charter school with a specific, clearly defined mission can accomplish great things with students and families who are attracted by that mission. Northside Urban Pathways, a charter school located in downtown Pittsburgh and serving grades 6-12, is a perfect example.

"What we do is get kids in college," says Dr. Linda Clautti, CEO of the 330-student school.

In the 10 years since its founding, Northside Urban Pathways (NUP) has implemented a number of unique strategies to help students grow both academically and personally. Last year, 98 percent of graduating seniors—80 percent of whom live in the city of Pittsburgh—were accepted into college, most of them in four-year institutions.

Success at NUP is no accident. The school's five-year plan establishes expectations for academic achievement, student behavior, and professional development. By following the plan, NUP has maintained a steady focus on areas critical to student success in high school and beyond.

NUP doesn't settle for getting its students into college; it also equips them to thrive there. When Clautti learned that some graduates were struggling to adapt to postsecondary studies, she implemented a mentoring program that pairs students with business professionals,

who then maintain contact with these students through their first year of college.

Students, too, are asked to set long-term goals for themselves beginning in grade six.. "It's not important whether their plans change from year to year," Clautti explains. "What's important is that they have a plan."

Because NUP is an autonomous charter school, operating independently from any school district, Clautti is able to make the interventions she deems necessary, such as hiring professionally licensed social workers and psychologists to be available for students and their families. "Being a charter, you have the freedom to be creative and to execute your programs without a lot of red tape," Clautti says. "Our board is great at saying, 'Do what you need to do to get the job done.'"

When students enter NUP, they are typically below grade level in reading and math. However, with the help of daily and Saturday tutoring programs, the charter school has achieved Adequate Yearly Progress—the main federal benchmark of academic success—for two years in a row. Reading scores jumped by 23 percent in the past year. Parent satisfaction is above 90 percent, according to school surveys.

The results are ultimately reflected in the names of colleges where NUP students have gained acceptance—Tuskegee Institute, Pitt, Penn State, Ohio State, and IUP, to name a few. These acceptances are a testament to what planning and hard work can do, and a

*This series is brought to you by a consortium of Allegheny County charter schools.*



**Charter Schools.org**