

# One City Schools

## *2020-2021 Process Evaluation Executive Summary*

### One City Schools

One City consists of two schools: One City Preschool (OCP) and One City Expeditionary Elementary School (OCEES). OCP is an accredited, independent, 5-Star tuition-based early learning center, and OCEES is a tuition-free public charter school. One City's mission is to seed a new model of public education that ensures young children are on track to succeed in a college or career preparatory program from birth through high school graduation. The objectives are: 1) breaking the cycle of longstanding achievement and opportunity gaps for children of color and under-resourced children in Wisconsin and across the U.S., and 2) creating a new system of public education that effectively prepares all children to tackle today's challenges and solve tomorrow's greatest problems, and to lead successful, happy, and enriching lives.

### What We Did

Researchers from the Center for Research on Early Childhood Education (CRECE) and Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) conducted a process evaluation of One City from January 2020 through September 2021. This process evaluation focused on understanding the nature and implementation of One City.

Our data collection included:



#### Interviews

- 11 Teacher and Staff Interviews (December 2020 – June 2021)
- 5 Family Interviews (August 2021 – September 2021)
- 6 Leadership Staff Interviews (August 2020-June 2021)



#### Survey Response

- (December 2020 – May 2021)
- 27 Families
  - 10 Staff
  - 14 Teachers



#### Observations

- (May – June 2021)
- 4 Preschool Observations
  - 10 Elementary Observations



#### Document Analysis

We analyzed several different One City documents including reports, newsletters, and administrative documents.

# What We Recommend

Our evaluation provided a rich understanding of the implementation of One City. One notable feature of One City we observed was the use of high-quality curricula to promote children's academic and lifelong success. Teachers and staff worked to provide safe and stimulating learning environments that fostered children's academic growth, social skills, and independence. Another important feature of One City was its unique, two generation, comprehensive approach to support not only the student, but their whole family. We observed this through the many supports and services One City offered to students and their families, including financial, educational, and social. As with any complex initiative, there are always areas for improvement. Below, we highlight four recommendations.

## Our Recommendation

### Keep innovating, keep dreaming big

We begin this set of recommendations recognizing that One City has undertaken a critical task of lifting up all children, but particularly Madison's Black children who have been long underserved by our community. In a short time, One City has mapped a plan for success by thinking outside of the box to create a unique set of schools. These schools are vibrant places that exemplify innovation.

## Our Recommendation

### Provide more staffing support and planning time for teachers

Effective teaching takes energy, planning, and communication. Not all OCP teachers have planning time and substitutes/floats to help in their classroom. The OCP administrators noted concerns about providing a full-day of professional development due to the issues with ratios and schedules. For these reasons, an effort should be made to schedule planning time so that teaching partners can attend together and have a shared understanding of practice. Further, OCEES teachers reported not only of their lack of planning time but also of the impacts of teacher turnover on their work. One City has already taken an important step in reducing turnover by providing professional salaries and benefits to teachers. To retain high-quality staff, every effort should be made to give them the time and space to do the planning and learning that leads to great education.

## Our Recommendation

### Develop additional processes to obtain family and staff voice in decision-making

One City is a community, 2 schools, and an organizational structure that reflects, in various ways, decision-makers, leaders, staff, and families. Yet, staff and family members do not understand how and by whom decisions are made at One City. We also learned from administrators that there needs to be clarification on who makes the decisions in what areas. For this reason, clarity and transparency is vital so that stakeholders know where they fit into the organizational structure. In addition, across both schools, the principal, CEO, and administrators make decisions about curricula, hiring processes, and concerns brought up by staff. However, parents and teachers have few opportunities to be part of the troubleshooting process or decision-making process. The system needs to have input from the parents and teachers into issues that impact their lives and also to be responsive to the input in a timely manner.

## Our Recommendation

### Improve communication channels to staff and families

Communication provided both opportunities and challenges. Although OCP offers multiple ways for families to engage and communicate with school community members, safety issues or troubleshooting processes are sometimes not promptly shared with parents. For OCEES, despite multiple ways of communication, some parents expressed that they could communicate with teachers anytime and receive a response, while others wished that communication with One City could be improved.