



OUR VIEW

Golden chance – this time, for the girls

If the new girls' school opening in New Bedford this fall succeeds as well as the school that inspired it, the all-boys Nativity Prep, 30 disadvantaged girls from the New Bedford area will be changed forever. They will enter a small, intense, nurturing middle school where failure is not an option. Confidence and good study habits, along with academic preparation, will help the girls excel in high school and propel them toward rewarding lives and careers.

Behind Our Sisters' School is a group of individual donors of tremendous vision and generosity. To date, the school is funded solely by those donors, according to board member William Prescott, retired headmaster of the Wheeler School in Providence. Our Sisters' School hopes to win support from foundations and corporations once it opens in September.

The school will be modeled after Nativity, a private, tuition-free middle school that opened eight years ago for boys from low-income families. Nativity has won praise for its long school day, mandatory parent involvement and volunteer teacher-in-residence faculty, all of which converge to keep students focused on school rather than the negative peer pressure they might encounter in public school.

Some Nativity boys have won scholarships to prestigious private high schools. It's time girls had the same opportunity

New Bedford has deep educational needs: Only 11 percent of 25-year-olds had a bachelor's degree in the 2000 Census.

All signs point to a successful opening. Perhaps most exciting, Our Sisters' School has found a home. Mr. Prescott reports that the school has nearly finished negotiating a lease on classrooms at Tifereth Israel synagogue at the southwest corner of Buttonwood Park. That's certainly a morale-booster for an institution whose address has been a post-office box thus far.

We're watching the school's progress eagerly. Much more work remains before it can open. Right now, the school is recruiting teachers and a financial manager. Instead of a regular salary, teachers will receive educational stipends as AmeriCorps volunteers.

Considering the city's needs and the incredible boost a school like Our Sisters' provides, we hope donors continue to come forward to enable the school to expand from Grades 5 and 6 in its initial year to Grades 5-8 by the fall of 2010.

And we hope the parents of girls entering those grades take a look at what is bound to be an extraordinary educational program.

To donate or get more information, contact the school at P.O. Box 7269, New Bedford, MA 02742 or call (508) 994-1255.