Pilot Overview

The City Heights K-16 Educational Pilot is a unique partnership among San Diego State University; Price Charities; the San Diego Education Association; the San Diego Unified School District; and the administrators, teachers, students and parents at three City Heights Schools. The partnership is supported by San Diego City Schools, an $18 million research and development gift from Price Charities, in-kind contributions from each partner, and an aggressive grant development effort.

The objectives of the program are to:
1. Significantly improve student achievement
2. Prepare educators and other professionals to effectively serve inner-city environments
3. Provide solutions to community problems through an active research agenda

Why City Heights?

Located approximately a mile from the SDSU campus, City Heights is a vibrant but struggling mid-city San Diego neighborhood. Its 72,000 residents speak more than 30 languages and scores of dialects, making it one of the most diverse and densely populated communities in the county. It is also one of the most economically challenged communities. It is often referred to as the Ellis Island of San Diego as it has long been the first home of new arrivals.

Unemployment, dropout and crime rates are high in City Heights; home ownership and income are low. Only about 40 percent of adult residents have graduated from high school. Nearly 60 percent of its residents earn less than $25,000 per year; more than 30 percent live below the poverty line.

Given this background, it is not surprising that for years City Heights schools have been characterized by low levels of academic achievement. Recurring problems faced by teachers and administrators have included overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, and student and faculty transience.

Price Charities’ Urban Village

Where many saw only problems in City Heights, Sol and Robert Price saw possibilities. Through Price Charities, they initiated the effort to build the Urban Village in City Heights and to reverse the spiraling effects of urban blight, utilizing innovative public and private partnerships. Efforts have been aimed at creating a neighborhood that will retain its residents and attract new ones.

The Prices targeted investments in five crucial areas:

- Safety
- Housing
- Community leadership
- Recreation
- Education

Why SDSU?

Early on, Sol and Robert Price identified education as one of the key ingredients for sustaining social change. They challenged SDSU to become an active partner in the revitalization of City Heights. With its core mission of teaching, research and community service, SDSU was uniquely suited to address this challenge. The university supplies more than half the teachers in the San Diego Unified School District and operates the largest bilingual teacher-preparation program in the state. Forty-two percent of SDSU students identify themselves as members of under-represented ethnic groups.

SDSU has an active research agenda and was awarded more than $124 million in grants and contracts in 2000-2001. Further, SDSU operates numerous community and social programs, such as the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program that serves more than 30,000 low-income individuals in San Diego County.

The education component of Price Charities’ agenda quickly evolved into the City Heights K-16 Educational Pilot, a six-year project targeting three schools: Rosa Parks Elementary, Monroe Clark Middle and Hoover High School. The proposal received overwhelming support from teachers at the three schools as well as San Diego Education Association and the San Diego Unified School District Board.

Backed by Price Charities’ gift, in-kind commitments and grants, the program began in the fall of 1998. Among its goals was a focus on closing the student achievement gap in City Heights.

“San Diego State University seeks to provide applicable knowledge to the world around us through our faculty, staff and students who believe in excellence in teaching, research and service. The City Heights K-16 Educational Pilot provides a perfect opportunity for our campus-wide community engagement efforts.”

—Stephen L. Weber, SDSU President