

Perry School Community Services Center: Case Statement

Overview

Perry School Community Services Center (Perry School) operates out of a building with historical significance near the crossroads of New York Avenue and North Capitol Street NW in Washington, DC.

In 1891, after 20 years of community pressure, Congress appropriated \$112,000 to build a permanent school, and the M Street High School officially opened. The building was one of the first, publicly-funded high schools for Black students in the country.

The history of the building has shaped and influenced the mission and commitment of the Perry School since its reopening as a community center in 1999.



Currently, Perry School leases nearly 24,000 square feet of space to the following nonprofit organizations:

- [Kidz Care](#): Provides a full-service child development care facility, for children ages 6 weeks to 12 years old. Services include childcare, before and after care, drop-in, and winter and summer programs.
- [Perry Family Health \(Ascension\)](#): Committed to serving all persons with special attention to those who are poor and vulnerable. The Catholic health ministry is dedicated to spiritually centered, holistic care which sustains and improves the health of individuals and communities.
- [College Bound](#): Academic Mentoring Program which matches students one-on-one with college-educated volunteers to strengthen the student's math, language arts, and social skills while preparing them for the college journey.
- [Foundation for the Preservation of Affordable Housing](#): Promotes the preservation of affordable housing in the District by addressing gentrification, skyrocketing housing prices, and negotiating the guaranteed right to return for all residents so they will not be displaced.
- [Little Friends for Peace](#): In-School Peace Class, After-School Peace Clubs, Peace Circles for Youth, Peace Circles for Adults, Conflict Resolution & Nonviolence Training, Social & Emotional Wellness Programs
- [Sursum Corda Cooperative Association](#): Works with families and individuals who want to return to Sursum Corda after a new complex is constructed.
- [Intentional Pursuit of Me](#): Provides proactive digital culture building and exposure to film production to combat the crisis of teen depression connected to social media consumption.

During the past 12 months, Perry School tenants have provided programs and services to nearly 4,500 adults, youth, and children.

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The space that Perry School provides to nonprofit organizations has a direct impact in the immediate surrounding area and District-wide. By providing affordable space, Perry School plays a crucial role to help keep the DC nonprofit sector strong and sustainable and to ensure that services and programs are accessible to those who need them.

History

Due to public funding support, M Street High School was able to offer teachers higher and equal salaries regardless of race or gender. As a result, the faculty was widely regarded to be one of the best in the District.



Carter Godwin Woodson, taught Spanish, French, English, and history at the M Street High School, was an American historian, author, journalist, and the founder of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. He was one of the first scholars to study the history of the African diaspora, including African American history. A founder of *Journal Negro History* in 1916, Woodson has been called the "father of black history". In February 1926 he launched the celebration of "Negro History Week", the precursor of Black History Month.

Anna Julia Haywood Cooper, served as Principal from 1901-1906, was an American author, educator, sociologist, speaker, Black liberation activist, and one of the most prominent African American scholars in United States history.

Born into slavery in 1858, Cooper went on to receive a world-class education and claim power and prestige in academic and social circles. In 1924, she received her Ph.D. in history from the Sorbonne, University of Paris. Cooper became the fourth African American woman and the first from the District of Columbia to earn a doctoral degree.



The M Street High School put its emphasis on academic and college-preparatory subjects, rather than focusing on vocational education for its Black students. The school produced a high percentage of college graduates from Harvard, Yale, Howard, Amherst, and Brown, among other places. Its alumni included many prominent educators and public figures including Helen Burroughs (started first vocational training in the nation for Black women and girls), Robert Percy Barnes (first Black person to earn a Ph.D. in chemistry from Harvard), William Cardozo (published a pioneering study on sickle cell), Jean Toomer (Black poet and novelist associated with the Harlem Renaissance), and William H. Hastie (became Dean of Howard University's Law School).

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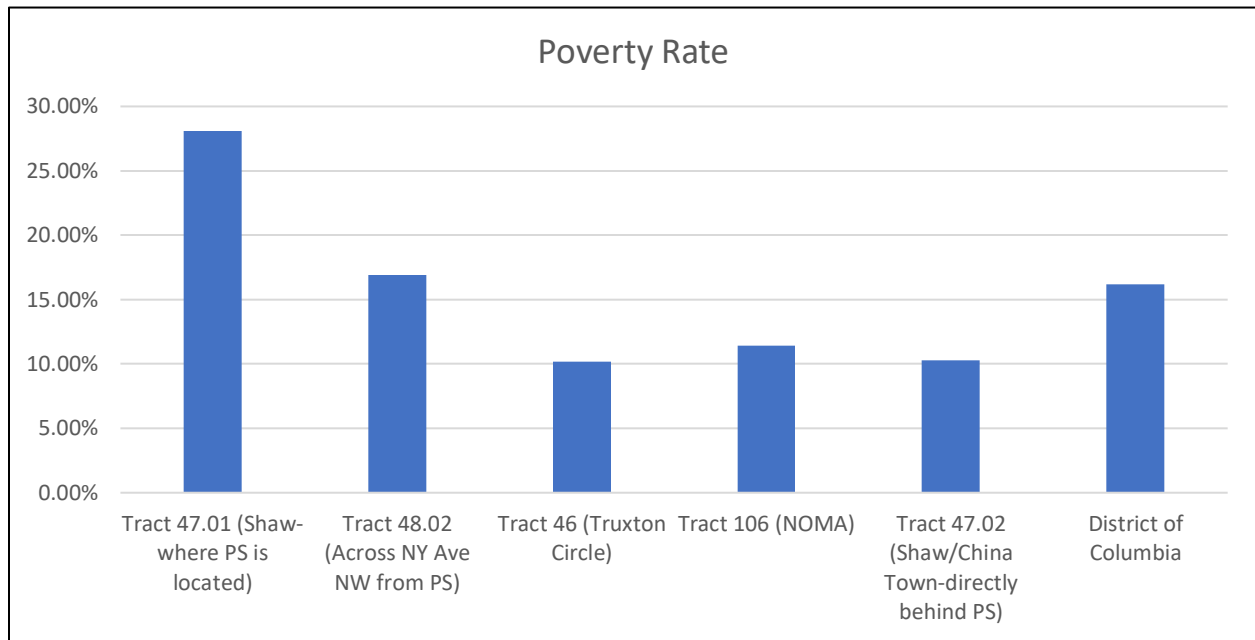
Building History Timeline

- **1891** – M Street High School opens as a college-preparatory school for Black students. The building was one of the first high schools for Black students constructed using public funds.
- **1916** – M Street High School can no longer accommodate the demands of a growing student population and a new high school, Dunbar is constructed a few blocks north.
- **1929-1932** – M Street High School is used to house Cardozo High School students.
- **1932** – The building became M Street Junior High School, later renamed Terrell Junior High School.
- **1952** – The building was renamed again as the Leon L. Perry Middle School, named for a principal, supervising principal, and school board member of the Black school system from 1914-1945.
- **1960's** – Urban renewal hits the community and much affordable housing and community buildings are destroyed. The Perry School serves as a shelter and food distribution center.
- **1970's** – The Perry School is closed. The Tyler House public housing complex is constructed. Marion Barry, future Mayor of Washington, and civil rights activist Julius Hobson emerge as leaders and become allies of the Northwest One Corridor.
- **1986** – Community members have M Street High School placed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- **1987** – A poverty study by the Urban Institute finds Northwest One to be chronically poor, one of few such areas in the city. Alverta Munlyn and fellow community leaders want to convert the building into a health and community services center. Developers want to convert it into office space.
- **1991** – Community residents created the Perry School Community Services, Inc. (PSCS). This community-initiated nonprofit starts raising money to renovate the building. They will raise \$5.6 million. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton helps community members put the financing package together.
- **1996** – Renovations for Perry School begin.
- **1997** – Paul McElligott is named Executive Director.
- **1998** – PSCSC secures its first tenants: Providence Hospital Health Clinic, College Bound, and Bright Beginnings.
- **1999** – In October, the building reopens at the Perry School Community Services Center. In addition to its tenants' programs and services, PSCSC offers direct services to meet the needs of community residents

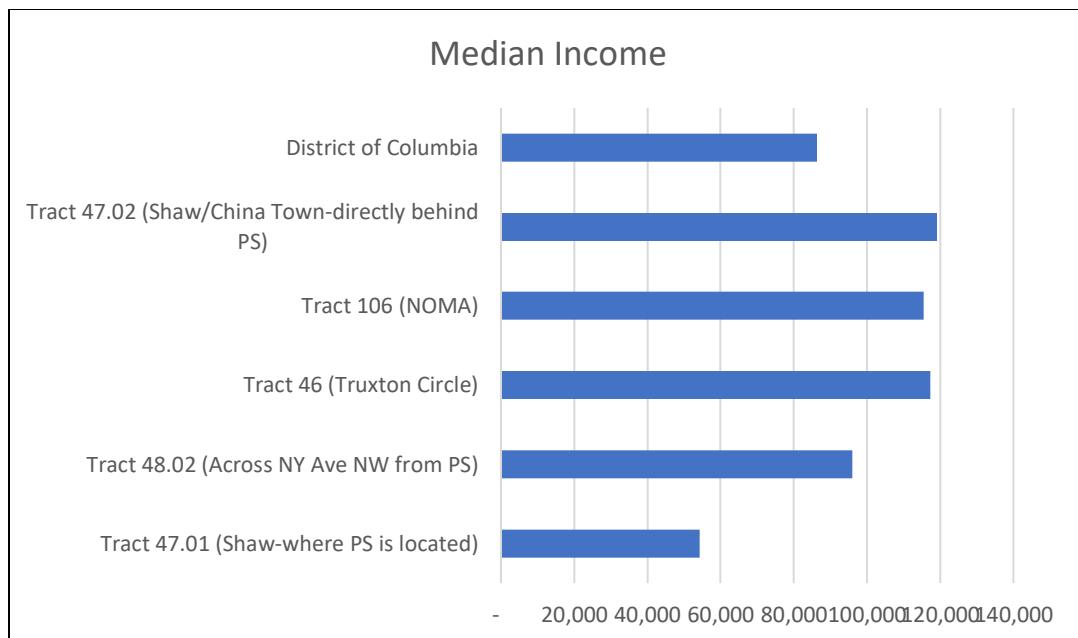
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Today's Challenges

When the building reopened in 1999, the area surrounding the PSCSC was deemed chronically poor. Current information estimates that the poverty rate in census tract 47.01 (where PSCSC is located) is 28.1%. As the table below indicates, as of 2019 the poverty rate in census tract 47.01 is higher than the rates in census tracts near PSCSC.



In addition, as shown in the following table, the median income is lower than nearby neighborhoods and for the District as a whole.



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Over the past 20+ years, the changing demographics have placed significant pressure on the Perry School's ability to recruit participants for its direct programs, to report compelling programmatic impact, and to fully cover the costs of its programs (due to decreased funding). In July 2021, the PSCSC Board voted to cease all PSCSC direct programming and focus efforts on supporting our tenants and their programs and services.

Since its opening, Perry School has been offering space at significantly below current market rates. The current, average lease at Perry School is about \$18 per square foot. Comparable rates in a 2-mile radius around Perry School range from \$43-\$65 per square foot. PSCSC's low lease rate has resulted in minimal building maintenance and repairs over many years. Under the lease agreement with the DC government, Perry School is responsible for all maintenance and repairs throughout the life of the lease (which goes through 2059). The estimated total cost of initial upgrades, repairs, and renovations for the building is estimated to cost about \$200k.

After 24 years as Executive Director, Paul McElligott is retiring in the fall of 2021.

The Board is focused on raising funds to upgrade the building, optimize building space to increasing rental revenues, strengthen cash flow, and attract nonprofits to the space that addresses community needs without duplicating current services offered by tenants.

Opportunities for Growth & Rebuilding

Given the retirement of Perry School's long-term executive director and the realities of the changing area around Perry School, the Board of Directors has taken steps to shore up the organization's finances and to more fully embrace its role as a landlord in this historic space.

The board has recently taken the following actions:

Approved the Renovation of the Perry School

The renovation of the Perry School facility will bring a historic building into modern times. As we continue to attract new tenants and community members, well-maintained and up-to-date premises are vital. An upgraded facility will improve the Perry School's relationship with existing tenants and improve our ability to attract new tenants.

At this point in time, the Board has decided to prioritize renovations of four suites which will bring about 5,000 sq. ft. of unleased space back online. When fully leased, this space will provide at least \$50,000 in additional rental income.

Perry School is also prioritizing these additional renovations:

- Remodeling and upgrade of all bathrooms
- Repair, deep clean, and repaint all common areas (hallways, lobby, etc.)
- Replace about 10 heat pumps that are at the end of their useful life

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These renovations improve the overall safety of the building and provide a better building experience for tenants and families, and improve building energy efficiency thus lowering overall costs.

Renewed focus on Role as Steward of the Building

- Increased New Tenant Lease Rate
- Recruit new nonprofit tenants
- Improve amenities in the Perry School for tenants
- Improve amenities in the Perry School for participants

The Board of Directors has decided to focus on the role of providing a community centered, shared space that offers operating cost savings and stability for nonprofits and their programs and services, cultural spaces, hubs for civic engagement, and contributions to the Sursum Corda (census tract 47.01) community. Even though the area is changing, we envision creating an anchor space in the community that residents identify with, frequent, and embrace.

With comparable commercial space averaging much higher than PSCSC's average rate of \$18 per square foot, the Board of Directors raised new leases to \$25 per square foot. The increased rate is projected to increase rental income by about 25% and provide much needed revenue to increase building reserves, improve amenities provided to tenants, and stay more current with building repairs and maintenance.

Strengthen Role as a Community Gathering Space

- Updated and Upgraded Computer Lab
- Flexible Shared Workspace
- Community Meeting Space

In addition to being a gathering space, we strive to create physical and virtual shared workspaces. The Perry School will be a place where people with different backgrounds, passions, and interests can come together, as well as a space where the public, private and philanthropic sectors can work together to improve the well-being of this community.

The Perry Board has emphasized the importance of upgrading the computer lab to provide access to several computers, printers, and scanners that are networked and loaded with a wide range of software. WiFi connectivity will be made available throughout the building.

The Perry School will explore developing shared workspaces, available to nonprofit organizations needing remote space. In addition, the multipurpose rooms will be upgraded to provide meeting, virtual meeting, and training space for nonprofits, resident associations, and the business community.

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Prepared for the Hiring of an Interim Executive Director and Permanent Successor

- Hire Interim Executive Director
- Increase Board engagement and oversight
- Move toward digital and cloud-based platforms
- Develop standard operating procedures
- Approved an increase in executive director salary.

A leadership transition is both a time of organizational vulnerability and heightened opportunity. It is also an opportunity to revise the culture, systems, and operating procedures of the Perry School to promote efficiencies and provides the time necessary for the Board to recruit a strong pool of candidates. To ensure that the successor Executive Director and the organization have the best chance of long-term success, The Perry Board of Directors will engage an interim Executive Director. We believe that an interim executive director will assist to strengthen the Board, reassure donors, keep finances and fundraising on track, and prepare the organization for a permanent successor. The Board has approved an increase in the Executive Director's salary to secure an experienced professional.

Request for Support and Partnership

To restore this landmark building into a transformation community hub of nonprofit organizations and community engagement, we need your support. The Board of Directors is committed to raising \$200k to fully fund the initial building upgrades and renovations and additional funds to help bring the building into the 21st Century.

Your support will help ensure that this building with an important history will be a place where DC residents in need can receive programs and services that will help them improve their quality of life and be a space that supports the important mission work of nonprofit organizations.

For more information about Perry School and the building's history, visit perryschool.org

To take a tour of our space or inquire about how to support, please contact: infoperryschool@gmail.com