Introduction

Imagine Indiana Life Sciences Academy East (Imagine ILSA East) is a charter elementary and middle school located on the east side of Indianapolis, Indiana. The school was the first Imagine charter school in Indianapolis. However, Imagine, a charter school management organization located in Ohio, has schools in Fort Wayne, Indiana and across the country.

Overview

Profile Completed: Fall 2010
Location: 4352 N. Mitthoeffer Road
Indianapolis, IN 46236
Grades: Kindergarten-7th
(8th grade to be added in 2011)
Students: 794 students
Year Organized: 2008
Square Footage: approx. 110,000 SF

Learning Snapshot: Imagine Life and Science Academy East focuses on the “Three Cs,” which are Curriculum, Character and Community.

History

Imagine Life Science Academy East started in the 2008-2009 school year. A board of directors from the community had a vision for a life sciences school, “a life sciences school in which the curriculum and learning community focuses on important values of life and intellectual learning in the human and natural sciences.” The board then contacted Imagine Schools, a large charter school management organization. The facility housing the school was originally an Indianapolis Public School (IPS) elementary school, designed to be an open plan. Eventually closing, a local church purchased the building, adding a sanctuary and multi-purpose room wing. Later purchased by Imagine Schools, the new charter school formed a partnership with the church. Sharing the building until the church built a new facility, Imagine ILSA East now owns the entire building and its grounds. Imagine East serves Kindergarten to seventh grade students, hoping to add an eighth grade in the 2011-2012 school year.

Values

Imagine East supports three values in learning, which are Justice, Integrity, and Fun. To emphasize the values to the students these words are written in the hallways and classrooms.
Imagine East seeks to provide a quality, tuition-free education option for children. The well-rounded curriculum offers math, sciences, the arts, and technology. A caring and motivating environment, innovative teaching techniques, and opportunities in the community encourage children to be engaged in learning.

Enrollment and Demographics

In 2008-2009, Imagine East had 624 students enrolled. In the 2010-2011 school year, 794 students were enrolled. As 8th grade is added in 2011-2012 school year, this enrollment number will likely increase.

Ethnicity 2010-2011
- 81% African American
- 12% Hispanic
- 2% Caucasian
- 4% Multiracial
- 1% American Indian

Enrollment by Grade
- Kindergarten- 133 students
- 1st Grade- 143 students
- 2nd Grade- 131 students
- 3rd Grade- 111 students
- 4th Grade- 102 students
- 5th Grade- 72 students
- 6th Grade- 54 students
- 7th Grade- 48 students

92% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunches. Students come from the surrounding areas, which feed Warren and Lawrence Townships, and Indianapolis Public Schools. Some students walk to school, but Imagine East provides five buses with two routes in a five-mile radius around the school. Imagine is a public school, so no student is refused enrollment, but a waiting list is made once the school reaches capacity. After Imagine, students attend Warren and Lawrence Township schools and Indianapolis Public Schools for high school. Imagine East considers itself to be family-oriented with an established parent teacher association known as the C.A.R.E. Crew. Imagine ILSA East also has larger population than the other Indianapolis Imagine school (ILSA West). Both Imagine schools are quickly moving toward capacity enrollment.

Mission

"Preparing students for lifetime achievement and the global future by creating an innovative and academically excellent school." (www.imagineschools.com)

Vision

Imagine East’s vision would like to improve the value of education every year. A goal is for the learning environment to become more consistent with leadership and principals. The administration and teachers always improve the curriculum according to the needs of the students. They hope that the first-year Kindergartners, after going through eighth grade, will be more academically prepared to a successful high school education. The staff would also like to continue the emphasis on higher education and their curriculum by developing an Imagine High School.

Curriculum

The curricular focus is on the sciences, but they have a strong music and arts program, too. The first two years of school (2008-2009 and 2009-2010), Imagine had art classes, but the teacher commuted from Columbus, Indiana, each day and could not continue the commitment.
They are working to get arts back into the curriculum. Each day, students attend Direct Instruction Reading classes, which are scripted and successful for students reaching grade-level reading. Students at Imagine East may eventually participate in the Advanced Reaching Challenge, which is the reading challenge all Imagine schools can use. Some students that excel in specific subjects also participate in the High Ability Program. The curriculum and staff emphasize goals for higher education by allowing professors and professionals to visit the school and give presentations to the students.

Community service is not a required piece of the curriculum, but it was previously required for the students' parents. Parents completed forty hours of service per year. It has been discussed as an option for students who cause problems in class, but no decision has been made. However, some teachers incorporate service programs in their classes.

Schedule

Imagine East uses a traditional school calendar. The daily schedule starts with Morning Meetings for all students, except for Kindergartners, from 8:00 AM to 8:10 AM in the auditorium. Students move to their Direct Instruction Reading classes from 9:00 AM to 10:30 AM. After Direct Instruction, students attend their special classes, math, language, and social studies classes. Students have six to seven classes per day. Higher grade levels switch classes, and some lower grade levels transition because of their reading levels.

Teaching Staff

Imagine East employs 33 classroom teachers, and teachers for physical education, music, and technology. Two special education teachers, four special education assistants, and five Title 1 teachers also make up the teaching staff.

Teacher Response

Mrs. Karina Augustus, a Kindergarten teacher, appreciates that teachers are allowed input about the curriculum and teaching methods. She also appreciates the individualized programs and the ability to move students according to their needs. Mrs. Augustus dislikes the lack of parent involvement and the struggle to encourage them to help the school. She would also prefer smaller classes with twenty students maximum. Currently, during the 2010-2011 school year, teachers have twenty-five students maximum.
in a classroom on average. Mrs. Augustus has adjusted by creating routines for the students to follow, making the classes easier to manage. Mrs. Augustus loves teaching at Imagine East and views it as a positive challenge.

Mrs. Taleesha Martin, another ILSA teacher, also appreciates the input and individualized curriculum because children can learn at their own levels. She would also prefer to have more people who were willing to support and assist the school. Mrs. Martin also feels that the building is old and needs updates, including more technology in the classrooms, for more effective teaching and learning. She notes that the leaking roof, which is undergoing repairs as of 2010, and lack of fixed walls create the largest problems for teaching. Both teachers agreed that the educators would rather have smaller classrooms with permanent walls, rather than larger classrooms with the temporary partitions because of the sound quality and ability to teach without noise disruption.

Clubs/Activities

As of the 2010-2011 school year, basketball was the only sports option in elementary or middle school. However, Imagine East joined the Indiana Charter School Athletic Association, and will offer more sports in the future. Other extra-curricular activities include tutoring and praise dancing. During the 2009-2010 school year, more options, such as sign language, reading, dodgeball, and basketball, were available, but teacher availability has limited the number of extra-curricular activities. Imagine East also offers before and after school care with a charge for parents. The before care is from 6:00 AM to 7:30 AM, and the after school care is from 3:30 PM to 6:00 PM.

Funding

Imagine East only receives funding from government funds such as state and local grants, but with no private donation. The C.A.R.E. Crew, which is similar to a PTO, was started during the first year, 2008-2009, to help with the funding through programs like Market Day. The fund-raisers do not raise as much as they would like to help fund the school, but they are continually pushing toward more parent involvement in all school related activities. Imagine ILSA East does not have an investment company that backs it financially, unlike its sister school Imagine ILSA West. CARE stands for:
“Committed to our children,”
“Actively Involved”
“Respect for our staff”
“Excited about our school”

Facility

Size: approx. 110,000 SF
Architect: Not Available
Year Renovated: 2008
Cost: Not Available

Introduction

The facility was originally an Indianapolis Public Elementary School designed as an open concept school. This means there were very few permanent fixed walls and instead a number of moveable partitions defined classroom areas. The building's center was completely open with only two science classrooms fully enclosed. Unenclosed classrooms had stations, forming corners to the “classroom spaces” with cabinets, sinks, coat hooks, and benches. In this main portion of the school are eight atriums, allowing every classroom access to the outside. Several of these atriums have a permanent enclosed classroom, similar to the west side of the building are the original enclosed kindergarten classrooms.

The IPS school closed, but it was purchased by a church. The church constructed an addition that included offices, a sanctuary, a long hallway that spans the length of the building, and multi-use space. The church utilized the original school as an academy, which the charter school uses today. The charter school and church shared the space until the church constructed a new facility down the road. Imagine ILSA East now owns the entire facility and grounds.

Spatial Systems

Imagine East staff has expressed a dislike of the open plan facility it inherited from the IPS elementary school. Attempting to create formal classroom settings, movable partitions separate spaces but offer little clear classroom definition. The partitions provide wall space for art and student work, but allow little acoustic buffering. Partitions do not work for younger students who participate in louder activities during the day. In addition, the partitions create classrooms of different sizes that do not effectively accommodate the teachers and students. Some classrooms are too small, too large, or too elongated. The school has gradually installed permanent walls to help with the problems of an open plan school environment.

Figure 2.20.12: The one story building is separated into two main sections. The older IPS section is to the north and the newer church addition to the south. Currently, the temporary classrooms outnumber permanent classrooms.
Main interior corridors and several classrooms are enclosed. Due to budget constraints, the process is slow, and a few classrooms are enclosed each year. Both fixed and temporary wall classrooms surround the 8 central atria with additional classroom and multi-purpose spaced located on the west and north sides of the building original IPS school.

On the west end of the school are kindergarten classrooms, which were enclosed as a part of the original building organization. Kindergarten classrooms have storage areas. Each room also includes a storage closet, a private bathroom, and outside access to the playground to the west. The library, computer labs, and older offices are on the north side. The gymnasium is also on the north side, but cannot be used for sporting events because of the size and lack of seating. The old main office and main entrance, which is closed and no longer used, are also on the north side. The new main entrance is part of the addition the church constructed on the southeastern side, and it opens to the main hallway. The main faculty offices, auditorium, and cafeteria are on the left side of the hallway, and on the right are several entrances to the classrooms. During construction, the church bricked over many of the windows on this side of the building, but left the windows in place. The brick is visible through the classroom windows and teachers have covered most. In the current organization and renovation there is a lack of clarity in spatial planning.

Circulation and Movement
Several main corridors act as the wayfinding main streets for the school. To help students, faculty, and visitors to navigate, the streets have names, such as Purdue Avenue. However, wayfinding still presents issues because of the building's size and current state of renovation and additions. The main entrance opens to the largest hallway, which separates classrooms and functions, such as offices and the auditorium. Other halls branch off to the north: one hallway follows the building's perimeter, another goes through the center, and several other hallways run perpendicular to the main central hall.

Most of the corridors are enclosed and use the same colors as the rest of the building. Little to no student work is displayed along the hallways and many look the same, creating wayfinding issues. Wall partitions create other corridors that provide better sight lines across the classrooms. These smaller hallways differ in size, include permanent rooms, such as bathrooms, small offices, and break rooms, and display student work, making them more recognizable.
On the north side, less hallways are used because of the programs of surrounding rooms along the perimeter. The gym is used for physical education, the offices are used for the nurse and social worker, and the library is currently under-utilized.

**Site Response**
The exterior has not changed much since the church owned the building. Parking lots surround the building on the east and north side. Refocusing the east side as the main entrance will help to give a stronger identity to the school. The playground on the west side overlooks a township park. The park, on the north and west side of the building, includes athletic facilities, such as several baseball diamonds and a swimming pool. A heavily wooded area sits to the south, and residential neighborhoods extend in all directions.

Because the school’s gym is inadequate for sporting events, the school partners with the church. The new church is down the street and has a gym large enough for the school’s needs. The students that participate in sports are bussed to this location for practices and games with other schools.

**Security**
Imagine East has created a secure building. The school’s offices overlook the main entry to the building and a camera monitors the outside. The entry is locked after morning drop-off and visitors must be buzzed inside. The system has a video/speaker system for verification of those at the door. Inside is a visitor sign-in system that matches all students to guardians allowed to pick up the students, such as parents and grandparents. The system is also connected to several sexual predator databases so no offender may enter the school.

The front entry is controlled by the main office, allowing access to parents, guardians, and approved visitors. This system controls who may enter the school since the school does not use a video surveillance system to monitor hallways and entrances.

To ensure controlled access, the original entrance to the school is closed and locked, with no plans to reopen it to the public or students.

**S.W.O.T.**

**Strengths**
- The school provides bus transportation for students.

**Figure 2.20.17:** The current gym is too small for sporting events but is sufficient for physical education classes. The school has partnered with the church that previously owned the facility to use their larger gym for athletic events.

**Figure 2.20.18:** A system similar to Imagine ILSA West that checks a database for those cleared to pick up the students such as parents, grandparents, etc. Manual sign-in is still required.

**Figure 2.20.19:** At the main entrance are several security measures such as a card reader, intercom, and camera. These help the front office determine who can enter the school.
PARTNER PROFILE: INDIANAPOLIS, IN

IMAGINE LIFE AND SCIENCE ACADEMY EAST

The facility is large enough to accommodate both growth in student population and opportunities for classes and activities with under utilized spaces such as the smart lab, music room, and library.

The partnership with C.A.R.E. Crew has created a strong community in the parents and schools with the school.

Community meetings allow students to know what is going on in the school on a weekly basis, establishing a strong school culture.

Storage and cubbies are available for each classroom, giving teachers valuable space for classroom materials and students a space for their own things.

Weaknesses

- Without an investment company, the school is unable to bring in additional revenue to complete renovations and additional equipment.
- Lack of new sources of revenue continues month to month concerns over operational budgets.
- As they are, temporary classrooms hinder teaching curriculum with differing sizes not used efficiently. Temporary barriers provide no noise buffering, something needed in an elementary school.
- Much of the space is under utilized in underfunded lab space, abandoned offices, and large under used spaces.
- The same color throughout the school and little signage creates a confusing environment that students and visitors easily get lost in.

Opportunities

- Continuing partnerships with the sister school Imagine ILSA West can procure new sources of revenue such as partnering with an investment company.
- More partnerships can be made with Imagine ILSA West and other charter schools, such as the Indiana Charter School Athletic Association.
- Spaces like the smart lab and atriums can be integrated more effectively into the curriculum.
- The backpack and coat spaces provided could be designed to be more efficient and allow students to have more personalized space.

- Hallways can be designed to provide better wayfinding by having themes for different grades of sections of the building.

Threats

- Due to budget, any formal art classes were removed. Even though there is a music class, it does not hold the same importance in the life sciences curriculum.
- With slowing parental support and an inability to find additional revenue, the school could be in danger economically.

Sources

http://imagineschoolsilsa.com/
http://imagineschools.com/

FIGURE 2.20.22: The auditorium is a space that currently holds weekly community meetings. The school has an opportunity to use this space for other functions as well.

FIGURE 2.20.23: Many hallways span the length of the school, each one looking like the other with the same color scheme and no display of student’s work. These disorient the users of the building.

FIGURE 2.20.24: One of eight atriums located throughout the school.

FIGURE 2.20.20: The Smart Lab was planned to be an integral part to the curriculum but after economic and staffing issues, it has become under utilized as a space.

FIGURE 2.20.21: Some temporary classrooms are too large, or too small, hindering teachers and students in creating an effective learning environment.

Charter School Patterns of Innovation
A Building Better Communities Project