<u>**Community As Classroom Information Sheet 2014-2015**</u>

The **University at Buffalo Center for Urban Studies** offers a program called, "Community as Classroom," at Martha J. Daniel Futures Preparatory School (MJD FPS). The idea behind this program is show students how to apply the knowledge they are learning in the classroom to improving conditions in the community and to see learning as a way of gaining control over their lives. This is accomplished by participating in programs that connects classroom learning to improving the Fruit Belt neighborhood and learning how to engage in planning and neighborhood development activities. The programming focuses on connecting the school with larger community and neighborhood issues. There are 4 programs:

1. **Community as Art (5th and 6th grade):** This project involves students in the struggle to change the visual image of their community by adorning it with a range of art projects. The principle is to show students how they can change the way their neighborhood looks and feels. Dilapidation and a forlorn environment do not have to be the characteristic features of distressed communities. Within this framework, we want students to think aggressively about ways to re-image their community and to imbue it with the energy of youth culture.

2. **Community Heritage (7th grade):** Neighborhood pride and identity are critical community building components because they create attachment to place and give students, along with residents, a stake in the neighborhood development process. The purpose of the Community Heritage component is to provide students with an opportunity to gain insight into the Fruit Belt's history, its process of development, and forces that have driven its development over time. The ultimate goal is for students to learn how to reflect on the past in order to gain insight into the present and formulate perspectives for the future. The Community Heritage project represents an effort to begin the systematic analysis of the neighborhood's history.

3. **Urban Gardening / Clean-A-Thon (7th grade):** Students work to plan an annual event that looks at cleaning up the neighborhood. The Community Clean-A-Thon is a community building project, which seeks to create linkages between Futures Academy and residents and stakeholders by using a neighborhood clean-up to improve the health and visual image of the community. A major objective is show students that even with limited resources a community can improve its living environment. The guiding principle is that citizen participation and building partnerships are the keys to building a strong community. Thus, the Clean-A-Thon is an empowering strategy and an organizing vehicle that connects Futures Academy to residents and stakeholders. The Clean-A-Thon is organized around the theme, "Collective Work and Responsibility," which stresses the importance of the entire community taking control of the neighborhood's destiny.

4. **Futures City (8th grade):** The Future City competition engages the students in a simulated problem-solving activity with real world implications. Each year, as part of a broader national competition, we develop one or two teams of no more than 20 seventh and eighth grade students, who use SimCity software to build a futuristic city based on a specific theme such as nanotechnology, transportation, or alternative energy sources. In this process, they explore various policy choices and decide which ones to apply in the building of their city. In addition to developing a computerized city, they must also construct a scale model of a smaller portion of the city. The students take field trips, using the broader community as their 'classroom', to deepen their understanding of the theme and to gain insight into ways that the policy and decision making process shapes neighborhoods and cities. Local engineers and urban planners volunteer to work with the students in the development of their projects. This further facilitates neighborhood connections and deepens the ties between students and role models in the larger community.