A GOAL Scored at Home
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Snow piled up outside Calcutt Middle School in Central Falls, forcing kids enrolled in Project GOAL into the school’s gymnasium. The space is borrowed by Project GOAL, an independent academic and soccer after school program, because they do not have a building of their own. Proposals for a new facility, over the course of the spring semester, will be designed by students enrolled in Roger Williams University’s Architecture program, in coordination with the Community Partnerships Center. On Friday, February 4, RWU students met with the Community Partners to get a sense of the program’s needs.

Vicktoria Barokha, Tom Bigelow, Alexi Mitchell and Javier Santana from Project GOAL gave RWU students an overview of the program in the cafeteria, as middle school kids grabbed granola bars and Capri Sun pouches and headed upstairs to their classrooms. Project GOAL addresses the problem of poor graduation rates and academic standing of at-risk-youth by using soccer as incentive to do well in school.

The program runs from 3-6 after school every Tuesday and Friday. Half of that time, students are in classrooms studying and doing their homework. During the other half, they play soccer. Report cards and grades are checked regularly to monitor students’ progress. If students’ grades are slipping, they go to the redirect program, where instead of playing soccer they have extra time in the classroom.

Every day, these middle school students fill out goal cards with things they want to accomplish that afternoon, that week, that year. The program revolves around setting and achieving goals. Every year, Project GOAL prepares kids to take the Secondary School Admissions Test (SSAT). Once the test is taken, the scores are sent out to local private schools. 36 students to date have received full scholarships to private secondary schools because of the program.

After their preliminary meeting with Project GOAL leaders, RWU students visited classrooms and talked to middle school students about architecture, college, Bristol and Central Falls. Kids sat behind low tables. They had youthful energy and smart aleck urban attitudes. Quick quips and answers turned questions backward and upside down. But when it came to the debate about what material the floor of the facility should be made of, they discussed in fine detail the virtues of grass versus turf — hard turf versus soft turf — playing off the walls or having boundaries — how surfaces affect the ball and the game.

Presently, the program spends much of the year in the gym at Calcutt, where an enormous blue curtain divides the hardwood floor and PVC pipe goals held together with duct-tape stand on either end of the room. Kids climbed on the small bleachers as they waited for practice. In fairer weather, Roger Wheeler, Moses Brown and Brown University host the program on their outdoor fields. The University of Rhode Island holds their tournaments. Project GOAL is asking RWU students to design a facility they can call their own.

The study will produce student-designed work. The preliminary research and concepts will serve as a cornerstone for funding to push the project forward. Funding sources like The US Soccer Foundation, Street Football World, and Football for Hope have turned an interested eye toward GOAL. There is a real possibility that this building will be built, informed by student designs.

The mayor of Central Falls sometimes plays soccer with the kids, having once lead Central Falls High School to the State Championship. Members of the professional soccer team New England Revolution host workshops for the kids and give them pointers. The program has attracted a lot of attention, as something that addresses the physical and mental needs of the kids. It is something that can shape stronger citizens and build a stronger Central Falls.