



Spring 2011

A REPORT FROM THE

Harlem Children's
ZONE

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

All of our work at the Harlem Children's Zone has as its starting point and core a commitment to the educational success, well-being, and healthy development of the children of Central Harlem. The overarching goal of that work is extremely ambitious: to break the cycle of generational poverty in our community.

A host of recent studies demonstrates that the best way to increase economic mobility in the U.S. is through education, specifically a college education. By earning a college degree, a child born into a family that is among the lowest fifth of income earners has a 62 percent chance of joining the middle class or better as an adult and a 19 percent chance of joining the highest one-fifth of earners. Children from families in the lowest fifth of earners triple their chances of earning \$85,000 or more per year once they obtain a college degree.

Today, only 14 percent of adults 25 years and older in our community are college graduates, half the city rate of 27 percent and the national rate of 26 percent.

We have long supported the Department of Education schools in Central Harlem with both in-class assistants and extensive after-school programming. But we realized that in order to accomplish our larger goals, we needed not just to support students in the existing educational system, but to help reform the educational environment in our community.

So in 2004, we launched our charter school program to cultivate and model academic excellence. The easy part was deciding what to call it—Promise Academy. Because from the first, we made this promise to parents: we will do whatever it takes to make sure that your child enters and succeeds in college.

In just a few short years, we have achieved remarkable results. Our children are thriving and college-bound. Their test scores are so strong that Harvard economist Dr. Roland Fryer, who evaluated our schools' performance, looked at the numbers and concluded that we have closed the black-white achievement gap.

We are proud of these numbers and of the larger achievements they represent. But we are even more proud of the way we achieved them—through the dedication, commitment, passion, and just plain hard work of our educators, parents, and students. It is their stories that we tell in this issue of A Look Inside. I hope you enjoy them, and perhaps even find them inspiring, as I do.

GEOFFREY CANADA
President/CEO



Promise Academy

At the back of the science lab in Promise Academy II are several large glass tanks containing fish, tortoises, hermit crabs, mealworm beetles, and a variety of growing plants. Science teacher Tyler Sanders stands at the front of the class, addressing the twenty-two fourth-graders seated in working groups of four or five in the center of the room.

"Scholars," says Sanders, "this morning we continue our work as scientists—working together, learning through observation and experimentation." With that, Sanders and his teaching assistant begin to distribute to each group of students an owl pellet and a diagram of a vole's skeletal structure. The students huddle closely together within their groups, carefully probing the conglomerate material with tweezers, asking and answering questions among themselves.

"Where did these little bones and fur come from?"

"From what the owl killed and ate. I think a vole."

"How did he kill it?"

"With his beak and claws."

"You could kill it with your breath."

"How did this stuff get out of the owl?"

A long pause, a sudden realization, and the students back away from the pellets.

"Oooow, nasty."

Sanders, who has been listening attentively, gives the students a brief description of the owl's digestive processes, explaining how the bird regurgitates the parts of small animals—in this case voles—that it is unable to digest. The students, their curiosity overcoming their repugnance, begin to take apart the pellets. They extract the tiny bones, then match and paste them one by one onto the bones outlined in the diagram in front of them.

As one student completes the process, he smiles broadly and says, "Now I see how the bones all fit together in the skeleton. If I become a doctor, I'll need to know that."

Sanders rests his hand on the student's shoulder. "Not if—when you become a doctor. You said that's your goal, right? And I know you're going to work hard to achieve it. And you know everyone here is going to help make sure you do."



Setting Ambitious Goals

It is the express mission of the Harlem Children's Zone® Promise Academy, with its two K-12 charter schools, to provide students with high-grade, standards-based academic programs and to give them the skills they need to be accepted by and succeed in college. But that ambitious goal is, in a sense, just a starting point for the schools' staff.

"We are working to create lifelong learners," says Kathleen Fernald, principal of Promise Academy II upper elementary/middle school. "That's one reason why we address our students as *scholars*. Of course we're making sure that our students excel academically. We are very proud of their achievements on the state exams. But we're not about just teaching to the tests. We're reaching beyond state standards, beyond test scores, to significantly affect the lives of our children so that they can be successful, caring, contributing members of their community. We want them to set and achieve the highest personal goals for themselves, to become their personal best.

"How do we do that? Everyone in the Promise Academy schools, from the maintenance workers to the teaching assistants to the teachers and administrators, is wholeheartedly committed to the holistic education of our students—in developing the intellectual, cultural, social, physical capacity of every child in our care, in building their character. To fulfill that commitment, we are constantly evolving—building on strategies that work, discarding ideas that are less successful. We do just what we expect our students to do—we come here every day ready to work hard, to learn, to improve on what we did the day before."

The Harlem Children's Zone launched Promise Academy Charter Schools in September 2004, opening Promise Academy I with kindergarten in the elementary school and grade 6 in the middle school. Promise Academy II opened the following

year. Today, PAI comprises three schools: elementary, K-3; upper elementary/middle, 4-7; and high school, 10-11. PAII comprises two schools: elementary, K-2; and upper elementary/middle, 3-6. The schools together now serve about 1,400 students. By 2017, both Promise Academy Charter Schools will operate at full scale, serving a total of about 2,300 children in grades K-12.

The educational environment in which the schools opened was not promising. Central Harlem's Community School District 5 has long been one of the poorest-performing districts in the city. In 2010, its students ranked lowest of all the school districts in Manhattan in meeting standards on the state mathematics and English Language Arts exams; eight percent of youths aged 16-19 in the community did not graduate high school and were not in school.

For many years before opening its own schools, HCZ had been operating after-school programs for students in traditional public schools in Central Harlem. The programs emphasize academics and include cultural, social, and athletic activities. They help to improve the lives and enhance the academic performance of thousands of neighborhood youngsters. But HCZ also had a larger goal: to reform the educational environment in the community—a goal that couldn't be met in the limited setting of after-school programs. So while continuing its after-school support programs for traditional public-school students, HCZ established Promise Academy I and II, charter schools designed to promote and model educational excellence.

Closing the Achievement Gap

Promise Academy schools cultivate high academic achievement through a demanding curriculum, extensive wraparound services, and the use of data-driven teaching methods. Schools operate on an extended school day and school year. Classes start at 8:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m., about 20 percent longer than almost all public schools in the area. When the school day ends, students participate in after-school programming from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., including tutoring and enrichment courses as well as sports and recreation activities. There are 210 days in the academic year, including a 20-25 day mandatory summer program, so Promise students are in school 30 percent longer than children in traditional public schools. In addition, there is Saturday Academy for students to get additional help, and there is programming available for the students even during vacations so the children have a safe, enriching place to play. The school receives \$12,443 per student—the amount allocated to each charter school annually by the New York State Department of Education—and Harlem Children's Zone adds \$3,482 per student in additional funding for the extended school time.

In the short period of time since the Promise Academy opened, the results have been extraordinary. In 2009, Harvard economist Dr. Roland Fryer and his colleague

Promise Academy At A Glance

- 30 percent longer school day
- School year runs September through August
- 84 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch
- 96 percent black or Latino student population
- 1,400 children as of 2010-2011 school year
- Free medical, dental, and mental health services





“We have a shared vision that all the children in our care are going to succeed to the limits of their potential.”

Will Dobbie assessed the outcomes of HCZ’s Promise Academy charter schools and programs combined. They wrote that the results prove “Harlem Children’s Zone is enormously effective at increasing the achievement of the poorest minority children. Taken at face value, the effects in middle school are enough to reverse the black-white achievement gap in mathematics and reduce it in English language arts. The effects in elementary school close the racial achievement gap in both subjects.”

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of closing the racial achievement gap, which has long been one of the most serious social concerns in the U.S. By the time they enter kindergarten, black children are lagging behind white children in reading and math. Today, the typical black seventeen-year-old in America reads at the proficiency level of the typical white thirteen-year-old.

There have been many efforts to close this gap in past years, but the best of these strategies produced only modest gains of about 0.1-0.3 standard deviations. The educational gains of 1.3 and 1.4 standard deviations achieved by HCZ’s Promise Academy schools, after only five full years of operation, are exceptional. By 3rd grade, students who began their education at Promise Academy were from 1.0 to 1.5 standard deviations ahead of their peers in the local area. The gains at the higher end exceeded the black-white testing gap by a factor of four.

In his capacity as chief equality officer for the New York City Department of Education, Roland Fryer has been working with city data since 2007. After reviewing Promise Academy test scores, he said: “I love numbers, and I look at them all day long. But I’ve never seen numbers this big.”

According to the NYC Department of Education, in the 2009-10 school year, PAI students exceeded the performance of blacks in NYC and NYS in every grade in math and in every grade except sixth grade in English Language Arts. PAII students exceeded or came close to the performance of whites in the city and state in every grade in math and in two of three grades in English Language Arts. PAII is the best-performing school in District 5, in Central Harlem; PAI is one of the top schools in the district in math and ELA in grades 3-5.

A Shared Vision of Success

Those big numbers are beginning to validate the Promise Academy’s big, long-term goals—goals that are being achieved day to day, student by student, in countless small ways, in and outside of the classroom.

Walking through the corridors of Promise Academy I elementary school, Principal Tonya L. White greets each student by name. She stops to praise a work sheet that a second-grader waves before her, asks a first-grader to tuck in his shirt. Noticing that a student’s drawing has fallen from a bulletin board onto the floor, she stoops to pick it up. Before she pins it back to the board, she reaches into her pocket for a tissue and wipes clean a tiny smudge on the floorboard next to where the drawing had fallen.

“We have a good maintenance staff,” says White, “but it’s impossible to keep everything spotless every minute, with all the activity here. So if I see something I don’t like, I take care of it if I can. So does every other member of this staff. At Promise Academy, everyone pitches in. Regardless of job title, we each do whatever needs to be done to make everything work optimally.

“We is a very important word here,” White continues. “I worked in other schools before, including traditional public schools in Harlem. They are good schools staffed by good people. But this is my dream job, because I think of a school as a family, and the Promise Academy really is. We have a shared vision that all the children in our care are going to succeed to the limits of their potential. We believe in what we’re doing. No one is running out the door at three o’clock. If getting today’s job done means staying ‘til six, staying ‘til eight, that’s what we do.

“We ask a lot of the students in return. Our curriculum is extremely rigorous, starting in kindergarten. Since most of our children come through our Harlem Gems program, they’re prepared to work hard when they arrive.”

The Promise Academy charter schools are a central component of the Harlem Children’s Zone pipeline, a seamless continuum of comprehensive supports that guides children from birth to college graduation. Almost all children who enter Promise Academy today are admitted through a lottery system, and a small minority because they have an older sibling already attending Promise Academy. A few students enter through the waiting list composed of those who entered but were not selected in the lottery. HCZ conducts vigorous outreach efforts to recruit lottery participants from among the least advantaged families in the community. Parents take part in the lottery when their child is three years old. Children selected are encouraged to enter the HCZ pre-K program for four-year-olds, Harlem Gems®, whose curriculum includes Spanish and French along with basic reading and socialization skills. For the past eight years, more than 99 percent of graduates in four Gems programs were assessed to be school ready.

When children complete the Gems program, assessments of their skills are transferred to the Promise Academy. Children who do not enter through the pipeline are assessed before they enter a PA classroom. The assessment process continues through every phase of a child’s education. It is a key element of the Promise Academy’s data-driven teaching system.





A Data-driven Approach

“Data are based on test scores and on classroom observation,” says Sheryl Ragland, PAI’s lower-elementary principal. “Testing includes practice tests based on standardized assessments, New York State exams, and tests developed by individual teachers. We also use web-based testing programs like Acuity. All these tests are administered regularly. We review the results in several ways. We look for patterns: do a significant number of children in this grade continually get this kind of math problem wrong? We look more specifically: how many children in this particular class missed question five on the ELA exam? And we break the data down to the individual student: What’s keeping Marcus from understanding fractions? What accounts for the dramatic improvement in

Sandra’s reading comprehension scores?

“Members of the administrative staff, like me, or guidance, or support staff also sit in on classes to observe how the teacher is managing the classroom, which students are responding to what kinds of instruction, which methods seem to be succeeding, and where things could be better.

“We use all that information to help refine and continually improve every teacher’s performance. When a teacher is struggling with a group of students who are not grasping a particular math or language skill, we have a teaching coach support that teacher. The coach might provide new strategies or suggest that a teacher look in on another classroom and observe a teacher who’s especially successful in teaching that skill.

“We also provide outside professional development. We survey teachers and ask them to assess their own strengths and weaknesses. The most common areas in which they want more training are technology and classroom management. For those, and for any area where a teacher wants or needs some help, we have a range of support options, from informational websites to workshops to classes at schools like Teachers College at Columbia University. Administrators also receive mentoring, feedback, and other support from highly regarded national organizations such as the Lorraine Monroe Leadership Institute.

“Professional development is built into the curriculum at Promise Academy, something almost unheard of at most other schools. We set aside time in the school calendar for teachers to get 90 minutes per week of professional development. We give teachers 45 minutes of planning time every week. And we establish a regular time for teachers to meet with one another, compare notes, review one another’s work, collaborate, help, and support one another.”

A Philosophy of Continuous Improvement

On a recent Thursday afternoon, the third-grade teachers of PAI elementary school are meeting in the principal’s office. On the bulletin board behind the conference table are the scores from the latest ELA tests. The teachers are reviewing the results and analyzing the ways in which scores can be improved—identifying patterns where students in each grade did or did not seem to understand the material, pointing out specifically where one teacher was successful in improving a skill, like grammar, and another lagged behind.

“The philosophy at Promise Academy is that we will continuously improve,” says Malkia Zimbi, PAI literacy coach and a former teacher at the school. “HCZ’s CEO, Geoffrey Canada, is a fierce visionary. He sets the goals, and they are always higher. One hundred percent of students scored at or above grade level in math last year? This year the goal will be to get all students performing *above* grade level. I love this process. I love how it makes me stretch and grow as a teacher and as a human being. But mostly I love it because of how much it benefits the children.

“The process that teachers use to improve their performance is similar to how we work with our students. Every Monday teachers hand in a lesson plan to a team, including a curriculum director and teaching coaches. The team reviews the plan in light of data on how students are performing in specific areas, and we work together to make any necessary adjustments. On Thursdays teachers meet among themselves to review test results and other performance data, and help one another find ways to improve. We’re a team. It’s the same in the classroom. Every student knows everyone else’s test scores. It’s all out in the open. Teachers instill in students the understanding that every time you take a test, it’s just an assessment of your skills. It is not something to be afraid of: it’s a tool to help you succeed as an individual, to help us all succeed as a group, a team.

“But taking tests is itself a skill, and children must learn that skill so that they can benefit from testing, so that it’s a more accurate measure of their accomplishments. Is it the full measure of who they are and what they’re achieving? Not nearly. But they need to know that there are different ways of being evaluated. That when they take a test, the results matter. That they are not always being evaluated in the context of this classroom, where Ms. Zimbi knows them as individuals and loves and adores each one of them. That they’re sometimes being evaluated by people outside this school, who don’t know them at all. Once they grasp that, they begin to think: if that’s how I’m going to be judged, then I need to take the test seriously and perform my best on it. They begin to think strategically.

“We take full responsibility for everything that happens in our classrooms. No excuses. And we want every one of our students to learn to take full responsibility for

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doing their best. Testing, observation, evaluation—those are all tools to improve the performance of our staff and the performance of each child. They help me, all of us at Promise Academy, to find the most effective ways to reach every single child in every area of study.”

Developing Innovative Teaching Strategies

Through data-informed differentiated instruction, Promise Academy educators employ many different pedagogical techniques to meet all children at their individual level of understanding and performance. All PA classrooms are small, the average being about 22 students. Every classroom has at least one teaching assistant working alongside the teacher, and some classrooms also have a Peacemaker, an AmeriCorps national service worker assigned to HCZ. In addition, educators—including administrators and support staff—work with students in small groups or one-on-one to assist them in achieving their personal best.

In PAI elementary and upper elementary/middle school classrooms, staff members are experimenting with an innovative differentiated instructional strategy they call Swarm, which brings the full resources of the school staff to bear on individual classrooms for a designated period of time. Every day, for sixty minutes each in math and ELA, they break classrooms down into small groups and flood them with adult educators, one adult to every five or six children.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, students in one PAI fourth-grade classroom arrange themselves into four groups of various sizes. The teaching assistant and teacher welcome two additional instructors into the room—the school's math coach and another teaching assistant. Each instructor goes to a group and begins working with students on various math exercises pitched at different levels.

The ten students in the largest group are arranged in two lines, teams competing against one another to correctly answer multiplication problems printed on flashcards. A group of six students works with word

problems in math: If there are five men and three horses in the barn, what is the combined number of hooves and feet there? Two students perform counting exercises with the classroom teacher, using Monopoly money to illustrate basic ten blocks. The math coach challenges the remaining two students to compete against one another in quickly solving questions in a difficult fractions quiz.

The level of intensity is powerful in the working groups, but most students seem relaxed when Swarm period comes to an end. “That’s it for today,” the classroom teacher tells the pair of students with whom she’s been working. “Any questions before we end? No? Any comments?” “Yes,” one of the students answers. “Before, I thought that was hard, but now it’s easy.”

Swarm allows educators to reach all students. Traditionally, schools are good at reaching students performing in the medium range, usually the largest group. With Swarm, educators can meet all children where they’re at, stimulating and challenging students at the low and high range as well as those in the medium range.

A Holistic Education

One of the goals of Promise Academy is to provide children with a holistic education. In addition to rigorous academic instruction, the schools offer a rich array of arts, humanities, and physical education programming as part of their curricula, including music, fine arts, theater, Spanish, French, and creative movement. The students’ work is regularly displayed throughout the schools and highlighted in special events like art shows and dance, music, and dramatic performances. Partnerships with outside organizations like the Manhattan School of Music bring in artists and performers to conduct workshops or special classes. But the core of the instruction is provided by the highly accomplished staff members who teach these programs.

Shelly Bauer, music education coordinator at PAII, is a professional clarinetist and film composer who has performed at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. Under her direction, PAII students begin voice, recorder, and keyboard instruction in kindergarten. All fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students participate in band or orchestra. At its first judged competition, the band was awarded a superior rating.

Jill Ashley Hummel-Park, who heads the PAI fine arts program, has exhibited her paintings widely, both on the East Coast and in her native California. In the teaching program she developed, modeled on the Getty Museum Art Education Program, students analyze the personal history, style, and techniques of famous artists and then create works of their own based on principles they have learned from their studies.

In a recent class exercise, first-graders are examining the work of the Italian artist Amedeo Modigliani. The students sit in groups of six at work tables. Hummel-Park stands at the front of the room, pointing to the Smart-board as she speaks.

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Smartboards, touch-sensitive digital whiteboards that run off local computers, are used throughout Promise Academy classrooms by both teachers and students. They are part of a rich technology infrastructure at PA that includes laptops supplied to each teacher to support classroom activities and software applications, like Achieve 3000, that enhance students' academic performance. The laptops, like the Smartboards, are used by both teachers and students.

The interactive Smartboards can save and store information written on them and enable users to employ data downloaded from the Internet and other sources. In this case, Hummel-Park has displayed a full-color reproduction of a Modigliani self-portrait along with information about the places and time in which the artist lived.

After discussing with her students the early-20th century era in which Modigliani lived and the countries, Italy and France, in which he mainly worked, Hummel-Park asks: “What is a portrait?” “A painting of a person,” one student answers. “Who knows what a self-portrait is?” Silence. “Do any of you have a self?” Hummel-Park asks. Laughter. “Yes, my self,” several students answer at once. “Today’s lesson is for us to take a very close look at how Modigliani drew a portrait of himself so that we can start to draw pictures of ourselves.”

Referring over and over to the portrait on the Smartboard, Hummel-Park shows the students how to draw an oval shape: “Put your hand on the blank paper in front of you, palm at the bottom. Now start with a dot at the top of the longest finger and draw a line completely around your hand.” Students then divide the oval horizontally into two segments of equal size. “Eyes go right on that horizontal line,” says Hummel-Park. “Eyebrows are a half moon directly above the eyes. No, above; that’s below.” And within minutes, twenty-four self-portraits take shape on the papers in front of each student. “Does that look a little like you?” Hummel-Park asks one student. The student pauses, then erases the straight-line mouth and draws a broad smile on the portrait. “Now it does,” the student answers.

Hummel-Park explains the program: “It teaches children so many different things—history, geography, math, different cultures. We learn about the color spectrum, about symmetry and line and mass. There are the measurable results: most of our students regularly excel grade standards on the art-related sections of the state exams.

“But best of all, as far as I’m concerned, is that children learn how art is actually made. When we learn to write, the teacher has us copy the letters *a*, *b*, *c* over and over. We have to do that before we can write a letter, let alone a poem or a novel. It’s the same with art. With this method, children learn to see the way artists see. This is how Van Gogh saw yellow. This long line shows the way El Greco saw forms. Art is always going to be mysterious, in some sense. This method doesn’t deny or diminish the mystery of art, it opens up the world of art and allows children to enter. It takes away much of the fear and confusion and allows them to feel the joy of creativity.”

A Network of Support

At Promise Academy, the view of education is broad; support for all aspects of children’s development extends well beyond the school classroom and the school day. Through its healthy foods program, the schools serve up low-salt, low-fat, freshly made meals for students every day. For some children, these are the only nutritious meals they will eat in a day. The school-based Harlem Children Health Project Health Center provides students with free medical, dental, and mental health services including physical exams, sick visits, vision and hearing screenings, counseling and evaluation, and health education. A partnership with the Children’s Health Fund, the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, and New York-Presbyterian Hospital, the center also helps to identify unmet health needs and to facilitate proper care.

After-school programs provide intensive academic support, including homework help and tutoring. Staff at the Promise Academy schools work closely with the after-school staff, developing individualized academic enrichment plans based on in-school assessments. After-school also offers students a wide range of social, cultural, and athletic activities, from chess clubs to media arts to cooking to technology.

Students take a broad variety of field trips during the year, including visits to local cultural institutions like New York’s Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum, The Cloisters, Guggenheim Museum, New York Hall of Science, and American Museum of Natural History; performances and lectures at the New York Philharmonic and Jazz at Lincoln Center; conferences at the United Nations Peace Summit; technology workshops at the Apple Store; and geocaching in Central Park. Students also occasionally visit sites out of the city, like local farms.

In addition to regularly scheduled school trips, some teachers, on their own, take students on weekend field trips and to events like professional basketball games. It is more the rule than the exception for



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teachers to go far beyond their prescribed duties, taking extraordinary measures to enrich the lives of their students, including tutoring and mentoring individual students during lunch hours and before and after school and making home visits if a student misses more than a few days of school.

The Harlem Children’s Zone provides extensive after-school programming to traditional public school students in the Central Harlem community as well. HCZ is determined to reach all children in the Zone, whether or not they are enrolled in Promise Academy, and through its comprehensive pipeline services to keep them college-bound. Today, more than 600 students from these after-school programs are in college.

Empowering Our Parents

Support for children includes support for children’s families. Social workers and counselors on staff at the Promise Academy schools work closely with individual students experiencing academic, emotional, or other difficulties. Those staff members often bring parents into the process, recognizing that families are the first and best support for children.

All staff members at Promise Academy schools make extensive efforts to engage parents. Principals and teachers, along with parent coordinators, call parents regularly to update them on their children’s performance, to encourage them to visit the school and its classrooms whenever possible, and simply to share thoughts and information. To promote two-way communication, educators and support staff freely give parents their cell phone numbers and urge them to use it whenever they’d like to talk, not just when there’s a problem. Besides parent-teacher meetings to review students’ performance, the schools have set up regularly scheduled get-togethers to help promote deeper relationships among parents and between parents and school staff. PAI holds monthly Dinners with Dads and Moments with Moms. PAI holds monthly Father Fellowship dinners and sponsors the Parents as Partners Association, which acts as an advisory council for many school operations.

With such extensive parent involvement in the schools, Promise Academy social work and counseling staff are often able to find out early on when families are facing problems, before the problems become overwhelming. Social workers make referrals to other HCZ operations and to external agencies to help families with ongoing issues like health and nutrition or job training, and with crises like a recent fire in one family’s home. But it’s not uncommon for school staff members themselves to provide discreet help, reaching into their own closets to give clothing to a parent on a job search, or into their wallets for financial assistance to a family in a homeless shelter.

Getting Ready for College

“Education is about connections,” says Marquitta Speller, principal of Promise Academy I high school. “We must connect with parents and families, because they are who matter most to our children. They are our greatest allies in promoting the healthy growth and development of our children, and it’s hard to imagine how we can fully succeed as educators without their active involvement.

“We must help students to connect to their own highest dreams and aspirations, and then connect them to the steps that get them there. That means studying hard, getting good grades, setting goals, understanding what will allow you to achieve those goals. We make sure that every child at Promise Academy has the goal of going to college and graduating with a college degree. But which college? We work with students individually, helping them to understand which college offers the best program for what it is they want to learn, which colleges have the kind of environment best suited to that child’s personality and personal needs. Then we take our students and parents to visit colleges so that they can see and judge for themselves where they want to go.

“Most important, there must be a real and deep connection between educators and students. We must be role models for our children. Educators can’t just stand up each day and talk in front of a classroom full of children. They have to really connect students with the subjects they are teaching. That’s why data-driven instruction is so important: it allows us to connect with each student at the level of that student’s understanding. But we also want to instill in our students an ongoing love of learning. That happens naturally when children see and feel that their teacher loves to learn. Our teachers are not just passionate about the children’s education, they’re passionate about the subjects they teach, about learning itself.”

Promise Academy students seem to understand and appreciate this special connection they have with their teachers. Natasha Hall, an eleventh-grade student, transferred to PAI from a traditional public school in Harlem in the sixth grade. “When I first came here, I was very far behind in my studies because I didn’t learn what I was supposed to in my old school,” says Hall. “I’m a much better student since I came to Promise Academy, and it’s all because of the teachers. They challenge you. They make you work. But they also help you in every way they can. It feels like a family here, with everyone supporting you to do your very best.

“Sometimes, in my old school, it seemed like the teachers didn’t care whether kids even showed up for class. A lot of students I knew from that school have already dropped out, and some of them are in jail now. At Promise Academy, we learn right away that we need to stay in school and graduate from college if we want to be successful in life. I’ve got good grades now, and I’m planning to go to Wesleyan to study business. I visited the campus with my Promise Academy teachers, and I loved it. I want to start my own company, probably in the clothing business. I love fashion. Promise Academy helped me understand how to work hard to succeed at what I love.”

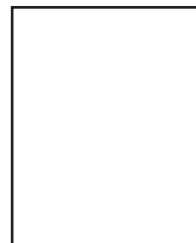


Construction has begun on HCZ’s new Promise Academy building. The 135,000-square-foot, \$100-million facility, shown here in an architectural rendering, will open in late 2012.



Harlem Children's
ZONE

35 East 125th Street
New York, NY 10035



*“Here everyone
supports you to
do your very
best. Promise
Academy helped
me understand
how to work
hard to succeed
at what I love.”*

Cultivating a Love of Learning

Patrice Ward and Kelly Downing team-teach eleventh-grade English language arts at Promise Academy I high school. Both agree that their biggest challenge in teaching teenage students is that the youngsters get bored very quickly.

Downing, who lives in Harlem, is an accomplished musician, familiar with the details of the daily lives and musical tastes of his students. But, he says, “The students live in a different world than the one in which I was raised. They grew up with a fast-moving technology that seems to have made it hard for them to sit with a text for any length of time. That means that reading comprehension is often a really difficult skill for our students to master. As a teacher you have to find a way to deal with that. But it’s important to meet the children where they

are, not get caught in your own little time warp.”

“Young people really relate to the moving image,” says Ward, a veteran teacher with many years experience in traditional public schools before coming to PAI three years ago. “So do I. So I thought, why not use film clips in class? This last week we studied a text about the fast food industry. It’s a subject every student cares about, because they’ve all eaten at that kind of place at one time or another. We read the material, then we watched a clip from the documentary *Food Inc.*, and we compared and contrasted the information, even the kind of information we got from each format. It got the kids really excited.”

“I love books,” says Downing. “And the students know that. I reach out to them by letting them know that I wasn’t always a good student, that I came to a love of literature later in life. They seem to connect with

that. I try to get them to share my profound appreciation for the written word, to see that ELA is a powerhouse subject, that you can use it to probe, analyze, speak out. That books can help you understand the whole world, and especially yourself.”

At the beginning of the semester, a high school class is studying *To Kill a Mockingbird*. They are discussing Chapter 12 in the novel. Teachers and students are seated in desks arranged in a large circle. The students seem a little distracted and inattentive.

“Turn to page 167,” says Downing. “Scout is asking Calpurnia why she talks one way to the black folks in church and another way when she speaks to white folks. I thought of you when I read this. I think of you all the time, actually. Doesn’t that make you feel all warm and fuzzy, knowing Mr. D thinks about you all the time?”

The students begin to laugh. They are now leaning forward in their seats. “Scout calls this putting on airs,” says Downing. “We call it code-switching. It’s when you use a different way of speaking for different purposes, groups, individuals. We all do it.”

“I don’t do it,” one student says. “Well,” Downing responds, “do you talk to your buddies after school the way you talk to Ms. Ward and me during class?”

Much more laughter. Then, one by one, the students begin to talk about the ways they alter their speech. “Girls talk to boys much differently than the way they talk to one another.” “I talk to my mother one way when I want something and another way when I just want to be left alone.” And as the discussion becomes more animated, it broadens to include a debate about grammar rules, a riff on hip-hop, a description of the kind of flattery that wins over a girl you like.

After a while, Ms. Ward checks the classroom clock and sees that the class time is almost up. “Time to move on,” she says. “Gather up your books and notes and get ready for your next class.”

But the students continue the discussion for another minute or so, eager to make a few last points, reluctant to leave a topic in which they are now so deeply engrossed.

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