

Thanks to everyone who made the trip to Harlem yesterday. It was a great experience and one we were very lucky to have. I told a few of you that in setting this up I was told over and over that certain individuals only had limited time to meet with us, but repeatedly those people stayed longer and talked more as well as brought others in to meet us. Everyone who showed us around was amazing in answering our questions and taking time to give us a good feel of the parts of the Zone we were able to see. Here is a short overview of what we did during the day:

### **10:45-12 noon Promise Academies**

#### **Promise Academy 1 Elementary K-3**

Tonya White, Principal

Four people from our group were able to tour the Elementary School with Leticia Frasier, kindergarten teacher, visit classrooms and read with a third grade class during their independent reading time. Kids are supposed to honor a request by an adult to read one-on-one anytime the request is made. Seen as a special opportunity for the kids. Tour group also talked to staff and observed the school day. Smart Boards in all classrooms. Great teacher to student ratio. One on one work happening at desks in hallways between specialists, teacher aides and individual students. Met with Principal Tonya White as well. Tour group: Cynthia McKenna, Kim Stone-Keaton, Leah Ward, Rhema Fuller.

#### **Promise Academy 1 Upper Elementary/Middle School 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>**

Dennis McKesey, Principal

Five people from the group had the opportunity to tour the Health Center located in the building where the children at all of the Promise Academy locations and those high school students enrolled in the after school programs are able to receive medical, dental and vision care as well as mental health. Met with Leon Stone, who directs the clinic. Were led through the Promise Academy by Ms. Walton and Pope, the Literacy Coordinator and Dean of Students. Again visited classrooms and were able to see the students and teachers (sometimes as many as 4 to a classroom). Also had the privilege of observing the beginning of the first meeting of the Brothers of Promise Academy Fraternity where the male students and teachers come together for lunch and to share their experiences. Tour group: Jackie Allen Doucot, Carrie Graham, Justin Evanovich, Jennie Bruening, Elby Gonzalez Schwapp

#### **Promise Academy 1 High School 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>**

Marquitta Speller, Principal

Toured the building with Marquitta Speller, the new principal who had only been on the job for three days. Impressed by how focused the students were despite the group visiting their classrooms. Visited two advanced classrooms who will be able to move to "open study" based on having passed the Regent's Exam early so no need to continue to prepare for it. This gives the teachers freedom to design special units for the students to study and expose them to a more diverse curriculum. Small classes (12 students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade Algebra, 14 students in 10<sup>th</sup> Earth Science, 12 students in 10<sup>th</sup> grade Advanced Geometry). 11<sup>th</sup> grade to be added next year by keeping 10<sup>th</sup> grade at the school. Teacher used power point. Kids had slides in their binders to take notes. Smart Boards in all classrooms. Most students go to summer school. Tour group: Megan Staples, Anysia Mayer, Casey Cobb, Danielle Derosa, Anastasia Ali.

#### **Promise Academy 2 K-5**

Kathleen Fernald, Principal

Toured with Tonia Washington, office manager/principal's assistant. Saw all of the specials rooms (music, art, gym) and a couple of classrooms at each grade level. Alcoves in rooms where kids could do extra reading or help with a particular subject. Progression of writing skills from 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade were shared and impressive. Younger kids were very excited to have guests, but older kids did not even look up while staying focused on their work. Full time science teacher with a great room including live animals. Kids

eat breakfast at school, 2 snacks, lunch, then to after school. After school includes homework help for a short time then the rest to be done at home. From there kids also are involved in activities to give them a change of pace from school day. They stay until 6 then go home for dinner. Also have Saturday sessions for all students at all schools. Tour group: Adam Smith, John Settlage, Kayte Devine, Dan Torf, Abram Colwell, Emeka Virgo.

12:15-1:00 pm **Q&A with Dr. Daryl Rock**, Promise Academies Superintendent

Despite being told that Dr. Rock would only be able to meet with us until 12:30, he was patient in allowing our entire group to arrive and stayed until just before 1pm. After going around the room and having everyone introduce themselves, he shared some of his own story of being a University of Hartford graduate and his experiences as a teacher and principal before becoming Superintendent. His strong message was that the success of the Promise Academies and any school comes from the strength of the adults involved. He encouraged us to consider how we identify those adults, hire those with passion for teaching children, and encourage them to create strict but nurturing cultures in their classrooms. He ran through two sample interview questions that he and his principals use and asked members of our group to attempt to answer them.

1. You are a new teacher and have found a way to engage your class and keep them on task in the classroom (the example he gave was providing short breaks in the classroom routine through the use of a video clip on track and field), but it does not fit with the curriculum. The principal comes into the classroom and sees the students watching this video. The principal tells you that it is not part of the curriculum and, despite your protests on the effectiveness of this teaching strategy, it must go. What do you do?
2. As a new teacher in an underachieving school, you have several students who are struggling to work at grade level. Why do you think this would be the case? What factors limit the students?

This led to a good discussion of the role of a teacher in being able to work within a system but also stand up for him/herself and make a case for effective teaching strategies, as well as the importance of quality teachers in children's lives. The second question brought out the need for teachers to take accountability for the achievement of their students and not to place other factors (poverty, family situation) as excuses for children not succeeding in school.

Dr. Rock left us with a sport analogy from his days as a high school basketball coach where although he had a well-designed press and taught his players how to execute it, he did not have the talented players he needed to win games. No matter what defense he ran, his team was not going to win a lot of games. He equated this to having a great curriculum but teachers without passion for their profession and rapport with their students.

2:30-4:30 pm **Session with College Success Office Students and Staff** at Columbia University

Again, we were told this session would probably only last about 30 minutes and we were there for 2 hours! The room was warm, but our group hung in there and took much away from both the 4 students who had moved through the HCZ and were now at local colleges. The College Success Office's Winter Institute is a program where these students and their peers (65 students) attend a 3 week program over their winter break from school. Students are paid to attend the program 40 hours a week (\$200 per week) and can earn extra money for good performance in the program as well. Price tag to run this three week program is \$75,000 for staff, student pay, meals, materials. During this program they are exposed to business leaders, interviewing skills, computer skills, dressing for success, networking, public speaking, and must work with a small group to create a business plan as their capstone project. All of these skills will help the students to continue to progress through college and into the workforce or graduate school. What the College Success Office (CSO) does was impressive as far as how involved they are in the students' lives regardless of if they attend local colleges or have gone away to school. The staff, three of who met with us after the students introduced themselves and gave their perspective on the CSO and the HCZ, told us of their connection to applications, financial aid, academic advisement, and even giving the

students rides to and from school as far as 10 hours away. The CSO also assists the students with summer jobs and has a huge network of internships with businesses, non-profits, social agencies. The CSO is the last stop on the HCZ Pipeline so we also discussed the entire Harlem Children's Zone structure and how the different stops along the pipeline are connected and work to end generational poverty.

Thanks again to everyone for a great day.