

PASSAGES POST

Principal's Message – Provided by Yvette Baxter-Sweet

Chancellor's "E's"

I recently attended the Chancellor's Conference for Principals. The focus of this conference was Equity and Excellence. Chancellor Farina spoke on both equity and excellence, but then extended her dialogue to include some additional E's. One of those E's was environment.

Environment always speaks to me, I guess because I started out in early childhood education. Elementary teachers are drilled on creating a warm and inviting classroom environment. It is part of the way social/emotional learning is addressed in elementary school. Elementary teachers are taught that children feel that they are cared for and loved when the environment is warm and inviting. My question is - what happens as children grow? Does the need for the environment that they are learning in change? Is it no longer important that it speaks positive reinforcement about what educators think about them? When students progress into middle school and high school, do they still need an environment that is mentally and emotionally stimulating?

Over the life of my career, I have had the privilege of visiting many schools. Most secondary schools that I have visited until recently really did not pay attention to the environment in which their students attended school. Only in the last two years have I started to see a change in this practice. In fact, on one occasion, I was walking the halls in a high school where I was attending a meeting, and I started reading the bulletin boards. I was really impressed with how they were decorated and the students' work that was displayed. The Principal walked by, and I remarked to him about my thoughts. He relayed to me that he intentionally hired an Assistant Principal with an elementary background, with whom one of the person's task was the supervision and production of bulletin boards. This Principal also expressed the importance of a warm and inviting environment that reflects the student population, and supports the reinforcement of their identity. I relay this caveat of experience to connect to the present.

As part of my end of year site visits with APs, we conducted environmental walks. We did so pretending to be a visitor of the building. Laterally starting from the outside of the building and examining what do you see before you enter a site. We explored each aspect of what you would experience when you enter the building for the first time. How you would be greeted by security, what do you see when you walk into the main office, are you greeted when you walk into the main office, do you see student work in the hallways, how long do you have to travel in a building before you see student work, is the student work current, are the hallways clean, colorful and reflective of the student population? We visited classrooms, and asked many of the same questions. Is it clear what content is taught in the classroom, is the room warm and reflective of the students that work in the room, what does the room say to the students, is it a space that tells the students you are valued as a student?

Our students are middle school and early high school. Our age range can be from 13 to 16. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of our students are students with disabilities. A large percentage of that group breaks into students with emotional disabilities. So, no, we are not working with elementary children, but we are working with children who definitely need positive reinforcement of their identity and knowledge that they are valued by the educators that work with them on a daily basis.

When you enter your classroom and look around the room, ask yourself this question - Is this a place that I would want to learn in? Keep this thought very focused. I am not talking about being a student at Passages Academy, but I am talking about that room you are standing in. If this room was anywhere, is this a room that I would want to sit down and be taught in? If I was a student in this room, what would this room say to me about how I am valued as a student by my teacher?

Attending to the environment comes natural to some and not to others in the educational setting. This is why next year this will be a school wide project. We will develop committees that will have, as part of their goals, to support the environment of our sites. I have attached an article that speaks to the impact of the environment. It speaks about a slightly different type of setting, but there are points that can be extrapolated for our purposes. As part of the social and emotional practice, we need to create space that shouts "We Value You!" Just some food for thought.

Belmont and Bronx Hope Highlights

Provided by Allison Trevaskis

Under the guidance of Bronx Hope Reading Specialist, Denice Martin, with support from Bronx Hope A.P., Mr. Blake, students and staff from Belmont and Bronx Hope's NSD and NSP programs came together for a once in a lifetime performance at the NYC landmark, The Nuyorican Poets Café. Never has an event of this caliber been attempted in Passages Academy history, let alone any event being as magnificent and powerful as what our students accomplished on Wednesday, April 20th. It truly was a celebration of the 20th Anniversary of National Poetry Month and Poem in Your Pocket Day.

The event was a showcase of students poetry created over the 2015-2016 school year in a writing movement called the Passion Filled Poets, a student writing group spearheaded by Ms. Martin in the Fall of 2015. Over the course of the school year, students met once a week as a group to learn, create and type their poetry. Students were matched with volunteer mentors who provided feedback on their poetry, some of which visited the student group and led writing sessions. Among the student performances, teachers and staff delivered poems of their own, several of which were mentor poets.

At the start of the 2015-2016, the Bronx Hope School Cultural Leadership Team set out to bring 100 guests of high talent to our students. In an effort to accomplish this aspiration the team reached out to every member of the school staff to reveal all potential candidates. This event was made possible through the collaboration of many Bronx Hope staff members, starting with Community Associate, Diana Doville, who initially made the connection between Raul Rios, Manager of The Nuyorican Poets Café and Ms. Martin. Raul's genuine love and care for our students was evident on his numerous visits with our groups at Bronx Hope. Soon thereafter Raul heard about the book, *Kites That Don't Fly*, which was to be published as an anthology of the work students created during their time in the Passion Filled Poets group. He heard our of our in house plan to host a Poets Café as we do each April in the Bronx Hope School Library and thought the event deserved more recognition.

There are many people to thank for the success of this initiative: Mr. Lisante for joining us and supporting the work that we do, Mr. Rashid (Assistant Principal of Crossroads), and Ms. DeLara (Assistant Principal of Belmont) for supporting, performing, and facilitating the participation of Belmont students, Mr. Harrison, Ms. Cheryl, Mr. Robles, Mr. Nedderman and Ms. Monica for coordinating the arrival/departure and safety of our NSD and NSP students, the houses/morning staff who ensured that the transition and safety of our students were met, and lastly to the teachers of Belmont and Bronx Hope for coming out to the Nuyorican to support their students.

Bruner Highlights

Provided by Barbara King

Passages students at the Bruner site have been working really hard! The students created wonderful projects honoring the special women in their lives. Following the Women’s History Celebration, the students enjoyed a great lunch. Before the Spring Break the students wanted to celebrate Earth Day, in which we were able to gather seeds and produced germinated plants in zip lock bags.

We also have two students at this time who took the English Regents Exam.



Crossroads Highlights

Provided by Erica Addy and Shane Gellard

Through the work and collaboration of Ms. Osorio, transition specialist at Belmont, and Mr. Gellard, guidance counselor at Crossroads, a Passages student was able to submit a High School application for first time ninth graders. Months later, after the student had already transitioned out of Crossroads, he was accepted into the school’s CTE program and wanted to see first-hand how the program operates before accepting or declining. The student was able to tour the school and work with some of the various tools the professionals in the trade use. The student decided to return to his former school but only did so after making an informed, educated decision regarding his future. None of this would have been possible without the support of our administration, our dedicated counseling and social work staff, the great counselors at Mather and Forrest Hills HS, and the resident’s group home and aftercare staff. We also would like to especially commend this student for his outstanding initiative and full cooperation. We wish him and all of our former students nothing but the absolute best. -Mr. Gellard



In March, Crossroads celebrated Women’s Appreciation month with the annual women’s history expo and luncheon. The male faculty served the female faculty and student’s lunch to show their appreciation and respect. On April 8th, the organization Love Heals returned to Crossroads for National Youth HIV & AIDS Awareness Day. Speakers Kim and Dorian educated students about HIV/AIDS as well as shared their own stories and experiences. The students were engaged and were given the opportunity to ask questions. Collectively as a faculty, we were very proud of the student’s ability to be receptive and respectful in dealing with a difficult topic.

On April 18th, Tupac Derenoncourt of 5 Linx completed Crossroads first speaker series. He spoke with the students about his experiences and his journey to becoming a successful entrepreneur. He encouraged the students to discover what their interests and passions were and to pursue them. The students left the presentation both inspired and motivated.



Dobbs Ferry Highlights

Provided by Fred Lauf

Passages Academy students at Children's Village - Dobbs Ferry celebrated Earth Day on April 22nd by starting vegetable gardens at each of their two cottages.

Students began by marking out plots, removing the turf covering the plots, and turning the soil. Turf was saved to cover bare spots in other parts of the grounds. Students found the work hard, but satisfying. One said, "I could do this all day, every day." Students were intrigued by some of the things they dug up, including large earthworms, grubs, and a butterfly/caterpillar chrysalis which they saved in the hopes they could watch it turn into a caterpillar.

Over spring break, students pulled emerging weeds and laid down weed barrier. Students will be planting a variety of vegetables and herbs including tomatoes, tomatillos, onions, and cilantro, all with the intention of making fresh salsa in the summer and fall.

Passages Academy Library News

Provided by Allison Trevaskis

On Wednesday, March 30th, Bronx Hope students had a fabulous day visiting the Bronx Library Center (BLC) on E Kingsbridge. Two school groups traveled to the BLC, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Students of White Plains NSP had a tour of the 5 level facility, signed up for a library card, had fines wiped, checked out books and learned about Library programs available to teens. The group checked out 17 books among the 5 students.

The second group, 162nd Street NSP house, participated in the same activities as the morning group and also screened the movie, "He Named Me Malala" in honor of Women's History Month.

Between the 9 students they checked out 15 books.

Our school was complimented on how our students conducted themselves, thus procuring an invitation to bring more student groups to the BLC in the future!

On Thursday, April 21st, two groups at Belmont participated in the Blackout Poetry Program, a collaboration between the library, Ms. Weber and Ms. Nadel. Participants learned about the form and then got their hands dirty finding poetry within non-fiction articles. Fun was had by all!

Upcoming Events and Announcements

June 9: Chancellor's Professional Development Day
Anniversary Day- No Students

June 14-22: Regents Exams

June 23: Regents Rating Day

June 28: Last Day of School

REMINDER!

- ◆ Staff surveys will be distributed on June 9th at Chancellor's Professional Development Day. Please fill out your surveys!
- ◆ For more information on Chancellor's PD Day, including locations and other details, please check your DOE email!



*"I am what I am today
because of the choices
I made yesterday."*

Stephen Covey

Important Links

Passages Academy Public Website: www.PassagesAcademy.org

Passages Academy Staff Website: <https://sites.google.com/a/passagesonline.com/staff/>

Passages Academy Handbook: <https://sites.google.com/a/passagesonline.com/staff/documents>

Passages Academy Library Website: www.passagesacademylibraries.org

Passages Academy Library Blog: www.whatsgoodinthelibrary.blogspot.com

Chancellors Regulations: <http://schools.nyc.gov/RulesPolicies/ChancellorsRegulations/default.htm>

ELA & Math Middle School Testing: <http://engageny.org/content/just-released-2013-test-guides-for-ela-mathematics>

Online Textbook Codes: <https://sites.google.com/a/passagesonline.com/staff/textbook-online-access-code>

Facts, Thoughts, and/or Questions for the Week

Success is the sum of small efforts—repeated day in and day out.

-Robert Collier