



THE ROUNDTABLE

The Official Newsletter of Benjamin E. Mays Preparatory School • Home of the Knights



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MAYS PREP • THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Mays Prep Reports Significant Academic Growth!

Gains in student achievement cap an impressive first year

If the results that Mays Prep students posted for the 2009-2010 school-year are any indication future performance, then the future looks mighty bright to fulfill the mission of preparing *every* student for success in high school, and beyond.

Notwithstanding the challenges that all startup charter schools face, the faculty and staff of Benjamin E. Mays Preparatory School were aware that their work would be even more difficult. With a charge to transform one of New Orleans' most challenged schools – the team quickly realized that

“...the work of transformation requires more than blind optimism...”

it requires executing the work with extreme care and delicacy.

After test results based on the national, norm referenced TerraNova exam revealed significant academic deficiencies, the school-wide focus quickly turned to literacy.

Director of Curriculum and Teacher Development Shanda Gentry says “Reading is a gateway skill, and if our kids aren’t reading, then their overall academic standing is in serious jeopardy.” “That’s why we adopted the STEP literacy program, hired a Reading Interventionist, and changed our schedule to accommodate the learning needs of our children – and the results of those changes were tremendous.” END.



How We Measure Student’s Reading Progress

S.T.E.P.: The S.T.E.P. Literacy Assessment provides a set of tools, tightly aligned with scientifically established milestones in reading development to follow students' progress from kindergarten through third grade. These tools are organized into a developmentally sequenced set of tasks that help teachers understand the developmental status of individual students and a class of students at any given point. They also help teachers analyze students' progress over time.

2009-2010 school-wide S.T.E.P. Results

| Grade | Beginning of Year (avg.) | End of Year (avg.) | Average Growth |
|-------|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| K | Pre, Pre-Reading | STEP 3 | 1 Year of Academic Growth |
| 1st | Pre-Reading | STEP 5 | 2 Years of Academic Growth |
| 2nd | STEP 3 | STEP 7 | 2 Years of Academic Growth |

Mays Prep's Doors Open For The First Time

A historic day for the city of New Orleans punctuated by the opening of one its first transformation charter schools

August 12, 2009 marked the first day of school for Mays Prep's inaugural class. Students in kindergarten, first, and second grades entered the halls of the school as their smiling teachers greeted them into their classrooms. All who walked through the building could sense the contagious energy that punctuates the beginning of a founding year.

“Although August 12 marked the first day of school for Mays Prep, it also marked a significant moment in the historic transformation of New Orleans’ public schools.”

The destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 provided the opportunity for the city of New Orleans to rethink its public education system, and the state recruited Paul Vallas to become superintendent of the newly created Recovery School District. Mr. Vallas, who had previously renewed the school systems in Philadelphia and Chicago, focused on a program that would provide more autonomy to individual schools through fostering the creation of charter schools.

Mays Prep is one such charter school, a transformation charter charged with the task of gradually converting a previously low performing school into a successful one.



Mays Prep opened with a commitment to maintaining a disciplined and structured learning environment



Our doors opened in August, 2009 – serving the students, parents, and families of New Orleans’ historic 9th Ward

Over ninety percent of the students who entered Mays Prep's doors on the first day of school had previously attended Carver Elementary School.

As students entered their new building for the first time, however, they proudly wore the maroon and white uniform bearing the distinctive Mays Prep insignia that symbolized their new school.

“Mays Prep's work is part of a larger movement in New Orleans' public education reform...”

which shows signs of success. In a recent CNN interview, Mr. Vallas articulated one facet of these successes, saying "In the Recovery School District alone in the last two years we saw an increase in test scores in every subject at every grade level." Other signs of success include active parent engagement at school meetings, as well as renewed interest on the part of community organizations.

Mays Prep principal Duke Bradley summarizes the meaning of the first day at Mays Prep. "All the hard work that has gone into the formation of the school has finally come to fruition. Scholars are in the building and they are actively engaged in learning. As gratifying as it will be to see this everyday here at Mays Prep, it's also obvious that we're part of something much bigger." END.

Mays Prep Receives \$250,000 from Walton Family Foundation

After completing a very detailed application and interview process coupled with a rigorous school model defense, a letter finally arrived that simply stated, "It is my pleasure to inform you that The Walton Foundation, Inc. has approved a grant to Benjamin E. Mays Preparatory School."

Director of Operations and Finance, Erica Crenshaw remarked, "This is certainly good news for the school and for the work that we are attempting to do at Mays Prep. But more importantly,



The entire Mays Prep community benefits from Walton's support

"...it tells us that an organization like Walton believes in our school model, believes in our leadership, and trusts that we will do what is best for kids – as well as be a good steward over the funds."

There is no better vote of confidence than knowing that we have their support. END.



The Walton Family Foundation helps to support many school-wide initiatives like our new Multi-Purpose room

More About the Walton Family Foundation

The Walton Family Foundation pursues a philanthropic mission established by Sam and Helen Walton, which began modestly in the small town of Bentonville, Arkansas.

The Foundation has long been an ardent supporter of public education initiatives, devoting much of its philanthropic interests to providing assistance to charter schools across the country.

The Foundation's Public Charter School Initiative aims to increase the number of children who have access to high-quality public charter schools. The Foundation supports groups that are:

- **Planning and starting public charter schools that show potential for dramatically raising student achievement;**
- **Developing state and national associations that serve, protect and cultivate the public charter school movement;**
- **Recruiting and training leaders and teachers for public charter schools; and**
- **Addressing the need of public charter schools for facilities.**

Please join us in celebrating this milestone achievement in the school's very short history!



Orleans Parish Criminal Court Judge Robin Pittman spends time with Mays Prep scholars.

R.E.A.D. to LEAD Program Proves Successful

In an effort to encourage Mays Prep students to read more, we created a program called R.E.A.D. to LEAD, implemented not long after the school-year began. The acronym R.E.A.D. stands for Read Each And Every Day, and the basis for the initiative was inspired by the idea that once student's see people whom they respect actively engaged in reading, then they will be more likely to replicate their behaviors.

Moreover, we framed the importance of reading around the core value of LEADERSHIP - meaning,

“...the act of reading is an act of student leadership.”

As a school community, our hope was to simply make reading fun and enjoyable, but it was to also communicate to our students that reading is an essential life skill.

Next year, the program will continue with more notable visitors coming to share their insights about the importance of reading... and we cannot wait. END.

Mays Prep Attracts Impressive List of Visitors

During the course of our inaugural year, our students enjoyed the benefit of having a number of special guests come to the school and share a few encouraging words with them.

These guests, most of whom are well known personalities in the greater New Orleans community, share a deep kinship with our school-wide mission of preparing every student for success in high school, college and beyond – and when asked to take a few moments out of their busy schedules to inspire the hearts and minds of our scholars, the answer was a resounding YES!

Most often, these visitors would read a book – but the most powerful aspect of their visits occurred when they shared personal stories of how they were able to reach the levels of success that they presently enjoy – and their stories were powerful. **Some of our guests included:**

- Marlin Gusman** – Orleans Parish Sheriff
- Rep. Cedric Richmond** – State Representative
- Nolan Rollins** – CEO, Urban League of GNO
- Hon. Nadine Ramsey** - Judge
- Troy Henry** – Businessman
- Sally Ann Roberts** - Anchorwoman
- Rep. Jared Brossett** – State Representative
- Hon. Robin Pittman** – Judge (pictured above)
- Dr. Corey Hebert** - Physician

Making Partnerships Work!

This year, several community based organizations partnered with Mays Prep. These partnerships were inspired by a common willingness among both groups to support children in concrete ways so as to advance the goal of providing high quality education and creating meaningful academic programs for them.

One such example is our partnership with the nonprofit group, Communities in Schools who worked to gather and donate over 1000 books to start our school-library.

Partnerships of this sort proved invaluable to our success this year, and we look forward to many more in the future. END.



Several partnerships helped make Mays Prep's inaugural year successful

Mays Prep Parents and Families Making a Difference

One of our most significant and proud accomplishments this year was the amount a parental involvement that we were able to generate. Mays Prep parents and families stepped up in a major way, proving that once families are engaged and welcomed into school communities, then their presence can yield wonderful benefits.

Principal Duke Bradley says, “We know that great schools have great parental and community involvement - and of course, we want to be included in that number.”

“We challenged our parents to play a role in the success of Mays Prep, and they responded!”

A great deal of our parental involvement came from signing them up at the beginning of the year to be a part of activities that were interesting and exciting to them. For example, last summer (well before school began) we



Parents like Ms. Kimberly Smith (above) often spend time in classrooms with their children. Here, she works with her daughter Uryah during Saturday school

invited all of our mothers to participate in an arts and crafts workshop. They were able to talk with one another, bond, and create unique parent relationships rarely seen in traditional school settings.

This momentum carried on into the school year, and on any given day, parents could be seen walking the

our hallways, working in classrooms, or helping out around the school.

If nothing else, the active presence of our parents gives us something to build off of especially as we plan to have even more parental engagement for the upcoming school-year and beyond. END.



Principal Duke Bradley addresses a group of parents on a Saturday morning

“One of our goals is to become a great school, but we also have to engage parents in that process.”

Mays Prep Scholars Take Their First Steps Toward College

On the morning of Mays Prep's very first promotional exercise, the excitement in the air was apparent. Despite being relegated to an undersized auditorium, the room was smartly decorated with a variety of balloons, streamers, and banners. The graduation, scheduled for 10:30 a.m. on June 11:00, was...

“a much anticipated event for so many people, especially the students.”

They donned white cap and gowns while the Pre-Kindergarten scholars wore a special designed t-shirt along with their uniform pants.

Guests, many of whom arrived an hour so early were ushered into the auditorium and were greeted by a student attendant. They sat down to a slideshow of pictures taken throughout the year, accompanied by inspirational music which played in the background – setting the tone for a truly spectacular event.

Once the time had come for the ceremony to begin, Principal Duke Bradley welcomed everyone and set the decorum for the day. Parents smiled proudly, while others had a look of eager anticipation.

After a few opening remarks, Mr. Bradley said, “Would you please join me in welcoming the very first graduating class of Benjamin E. Mays Preparatory School!”

With that announcement, the crowd erupted and the doors of the auditorium opened. Scholars began marching into room to beat of “Pomp and Circumstance”. Little did they know, the tiny steps they were taking were actually giant steps toward college. END.

Graduation 2010



Over 200 guests packed welcomed Mays Prep's first Pre-K and Kindergarten promotional exercise



Kindergarten Scholar Eric Davis, Jr. leads the Pledge of Allegiance



Scholars march in, saying “goodbye” to Pre-K, and “hello” to Kindergarten