



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruben Diaz

Real Opportunities for Black and Hispanic Students

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What You Should Know

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Real Opportunities for Black and Hispanic Students

You should know that charter schools are creating real opportunities for Black and Hispanic students throughout the five boroughs of New York City and that I have been a supporter of charter schools long before I was an elected official.

You should know there are different groups or networks that sponsor charter schools throughout New York State who are doing a wonderful job. Some of them are: Success Academy, KIPP NYC, Families for Excellent Schools, New York City Charter School Center, Achievement First, Uncommon Schools, Millennium Art Academy and Public Prep Network, etc.

Today, I want to take this opportunity to let you know about some of the success stories of students in my Senate District who have attended KIPP NYC charter schools.

You should know the story of Jaime Bravo who came to my office last week to talk to me and my staff about his experience. In elementary school, he was labeled a student who “couldn’t learn” and was given an Individual Education Plan (IEP). As he explained, it wasn’t that he “couldn’t learn” he just learned differently.

In middle school, he enrolled in a KIPP charter school and his teachers worked to understand how he learned best. They helped him by tutoring him when he was struggling and encouraged him to think about the future and about college. By the time he left eighth grade, he’d been awarded a full ride to high school. Today, he’s on a full scholarship at Fordham University and will graduate in May, on time, with a major in economics. Jaime told us, “I just want other students to have what I had.” Students who attend a charter middle school like Jaime have a college completion rate that is four times the rate for low income students nationwide.

Another story that you should know is about college sophomore Amber-Lee Brown. She enrolled in the charter school nine years ago as a sixth grade student who showed a natural inclination towards problem-solving and precision. In this charter school, not only was she encouraged to pursue her interest in math but the school’s curriculum was designed in a way that prepared her to take the Algebra Regents Exam as an eighth grader.

You should know that she continued her journey at a College Prep Charter High School in the Bronx. She took several Advanced Placement courses, including AP Microeconomics, AP U.S. History, AP Statistics, AP Environmental Science and AP Calculus. “She’s the kind of student who will always push beyond what is required.” says college advisor Betty Damaso.

Today, Amber-Lee has a 3.0 GPA at Howard University, studies chemical engineering, and is very active in the Black Student Union. “The charter school I attended planted the seed that if I went to college that I could do so much more and they kept me on track to get here. I now know the pay-off is worth it in the end. The thought of that not being possible for other kids like me out there is worth fighting for.”

Another story worth noticing is of Chris Diaz who grew up in Tremont. His mom was looking for “a different kind of school, a different kind of experience” for her son. When Chris enrolled in the charter school as a sixth grader in 2000, both he and his mom found exactly what they were looking for. Students wanted to stay an extra hour after school to practice their violin or get extra help from a teacher. The teachers created a warm and inviting environment that made students want to be there.

Chris’s charter school educators stuck by him every step of the way through high school and college. He told us “Staff members will drive up to your school in the middle of winter when there is two feet of snow on the ground, just to see how you are doing.” Chris went on to attend Colgate University with a nearly a full scholarship and studied psychology and film.

Today, Chris is teaching math at the very same charter school where he studied algebra so long ago. “I want to see my students go right through college and come back and teach here or give back to the community in some way. You hear a lot about 'getting out of the neighborhood.' But I say, why would you want to get out when you can come back and help us change it?” he said.

You should know these are just three of the tens of thousands of students in New York City charter schools getting a great education. There are many, many more families who want and deserve this educational option for their children. And the state legislature can help by raising the cap on charter schools, giving them fair funding and providing funding for space if they are in private buildings. I don’t always agree with the Governor, but I agree with him on this.

I am State Senator Rev. Rubén Díaz, and this is what you should know.