



Urban School Leadership

Transcript of Speaker

The School for Law, Government and Justice

“Realizing the Vision”

Developing a School from the Ground Up

David Banks, Principal

Introduction

Discover the characteristics, strategies and grace this urban leader displays daily to realize the vision for this unique high school. Principal, David Banks, openly and candidly shares his journey towards success creating, from scratch, what has become a successful urban school. Follow his path from the initial phase, the dream to a dream deferred, to a dream realized. Mr. Banks candidly shares the agonies and ecstasy of developing a school from the ground up.

Listen as this leader and several partners tell their story of commitment and hope for the High School of Law, Government and Social Change.

Bridging the Gap Between Law & Education

My name is David Banks. I am the founding Principal of this school, which is the Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice.

About a dozen years ago or so, the state of New York had put in a motion a plan to build a new, \$350 million Supreme Court complex in the Bronx. There was a lot of the community residents who offered a level of resistance to the plan, and in order to get



the community buy-in, they agreed to build a school; a school that would be on the same complex as the courthouse.

You should know that the original idea was that the school was to be housed inside of the courthouse; and then soon after that, you had the Oklahoma City bombing in 1993, and then Mayor, Rudy Guliani, turned thumbs down on the idea of the school being housed inside of the Criminal Justice facility. And he supported the idea of the school having its own stand-alone facility. This was all part of an overall plan that would bridge the gap between a criminal justice facility and an educational institution.

So what emerged from that was the birth of the Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice; a school which young people would have an opportunity to learn firsthand about the inner workings of the court system; to be exposed to a myriad of classes and coursework around law, justice and governmental issues.

Internship Program

We have, I think, an award-winning internship program here. All of our eleventh and twelfth graders are required to participate in a real-world internship experience. And that goes really into the heart and philosophy of the school, which was that the education of our young people doesn't simply exist within the four walls of the school.

And, so, our eleventh graders go out one day a week, and the seniors go out three/four days a week to various internship experiences all over the city. So, we have young people working in law firms, side-by-side with judges, the New York City Law Department. We have them at the Public Advocate's Office, the District Attorney's Office, congressmen's office, borough president's offices, where they really get some,



some fair insight into the workings of those offices and connecting that to the kind of work that we do here.

The students all have an internship seminar. We go over protocols for the workplace. And I think it's an exciting thing for them to look forward to being part of; and I think it really bridges the gap between school and the real world.

Student Expectations

What we are able to do here, and we expect to do here, is to find as many, in terms of the teaching staff, to find people who are bright, committed, dedicated, hardworking individuals.

We have a dress code here at the school, because we think it also speaks to the level of expectation that we have for our students. We want them to carry themselves a certain way at all times. We want them to speak and be able to write well. We want them to be able to have very powerful interactions amongst themselves, amongst the adults in this building.

So, the expectation here is a high expectation. We expect our students to be in school every single day – no excuses. We expect for them to be on time, and there are consequences if they are not.

We have those same expectations of our parents as partners here in the school. So we have developed a very powerful family-type of atmosphere in our school.

No child gets lost here, and that's because of the great staff that we've been able to put together, the leadership that we have at the school.



But I think above all else is the expectation that we have that we expect everybody to rise to the level to be the best that they can be.

The benefits of having a great staff of counselors and other administrators, great teachers, and then a host of other resources which we bring in from outside of the facility are that it really brings to bear on what we're trying to do here; a full complement of resources that ultimately help young people.

Our goal here, ultimately, is to graduate every single one of our students and to see them go off to college and to do well in college. And, so, what we are constantly engaged in is how do you bring the resources together that help to make that happen.

As an example, when we talk about law, government and justice as our theme for the school, the goal here is not to develop the future lawyers of America per se; but, rather, we want to use those issues that are legal issues and justice issues to tap into the interests that young people, to give them an opportunity to develop their verbal skills, develop their critical thinking skills and their writing skills and abilities, and learn to work cooperatively as a team, to learn to develop their leadership abilities.

Community & Corporate Partnerships

Now, every step that we make along the way connects to that. We have a wonderful partnership with an organization called News Corporation, which, you know, is a multi-billion dollar operation founded by Rupert Murdoch. They have given—over 60 of our students have had internships – paid internships, summer jobs, working at their various subsidiaries, which include Fox 5, Harper-Collins Publishing, News America Marketing, the New York Post, and a whole host of other subsidiaries that are part of the



News Corporation. They give our young people opportunities for exposure and to see what's really going on in the world. The students have an opportunity to have mentors who continue to work with them and assist them.

We've had students who started in these internship opportunities as early as the tenth grade, and have gone all the way through. And several of them are attending college now here in the New York City area and are still employed by News Corporation.

When Mr. Murdock came to our school, he said, I ultimately want to see students from this school serving as my future leaders in the hierarchy at News Corporation, of future vice presidents. And I think we're well on our way, really, to seeing that happen.

So, there's been great partnerships with a whole host of organizations; all of which have been aimed at helping us to actualize the vision, and the philosophy, and the overall goals that we have for all of our young people.

Philosophy & Goals

In terms of my overall vision and philosophy of the school, there were a number of things that I realized early on as an educator, as a teacher prior to even becoming an assistant principal or a principal, that reinforced the notion for me that we needed to bring in outside resources to actualize the kinds of goals that you see and the vision that you have for young people.

I'll give you an example. When I was a first-year teacher at a Brooklyn elementary school, I had a conversation with my fifth grade class, and I talked to them about the fact that I was a graduate of Rutgers University in New Jersey, and those were



some of the best times in my life. And many of the intercity students have never even visited a college campus.

And, so, I went to my principal at that time, and I said to her, I'd love to take the students on a trip to my old college. And she thought it was a great idea, and I took another class as well. And we went to New Brunswick, New Jersey. The kids met us early in the morning—the parents got them there at 6:30 or 7 o'clock in the morning to the bus—and it was one of the most thrilling things that we've ever done that I've ever been a part of to give those young people an opportunity to walk a college campus, to meet students and go into the student center; to have professors come and speak to them in the classrooms, in the huge lecture halls at a large university like Rutgers. To take them through the dorms, and let the college students let them sit in their rooms and talk to them about what it's like be in college. The kids were on fire. We lit that fire and got them excited and passionate. And it made college to them. When it's real to them, then that's the solid starting point that you need.

I've used that as I've moved on throughout my experiences here in education as an assistant principal and a principal to do those same kinds of things. And I think that's why the internship opportunity is so critical.

Another initiative that we have here at the school is a guest speaker series. We have brought in literally over a hundred guest speakers. We've had people such as Senator Bill Bradley. We've had Johnny Cochran, who was our principal for a day.

Danny Glover, the actor, came and spoke at our school because our student government president, who was in the eleventh grade, was out for lunch and happened to



see him through the window, went inside the restaurant and introduced herself to him and told him about this wonderful school that she goes to. And as president of the student government, she was authorized to invite him to come and be part of our guest speaker series. And he called the next day and said he was so impressed with this young lady and how articulate she was and how passionate she was about her school, that he assumed that some great things were going on here, and he'd love to come. And he came and spent half a day with us at the school.

It's just further examples of, I think, the kind of energy and passion that we've been able to convey to our young people and the confidence that we have given them. And I think it's, in no small part, because of the resources and the external kinds of things that we've also brought to bear here at the school, which have really helped the students to make those connections. And I work regularly to bring those kinds of experiences to bear on our young people.

Approaches to Successful Leadership

But I think as I work with our teachers here, it's with the same kinds of elements that I was raised with, which is to have an open line of communication, but yet to know that we work within certain parameters. I see myself as a blend between the traditional approach to education and leadership and the more progressive approaches that are used today.

My leadership starts with having, again, high expectations for everyone here, including my staff and being engaged in constant dialog and communication with the staff about things that relate to education; and sometimes just asking people about how is



your son doing; I know that he wasn't feeling well a few days ago. And that means a lot to people when they know that you care.

And I believe very much in management by walking around, so I'm on my feet all day long.

The Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice is, of course, housed in the South Bronx, the Motthaven section. It's a community that is very much on the rise, and one that we're very proud to be a part of.

We've had a lot of buy-in from everyone, really, in this community. This is the first year that we're in this new facility – a \$75 million project that has a \$1 million courtroom that we sit in now, a forensics lab, a crime scene lab, a beautiful gym on the top floor, a workout room, a student cafeteria and wonderful classrooms, and a grand lobby when you walk in. It really is a beautiful place to work and to go to school. But our partners and the community that surrounds this particular facility have all bought into what we're trying to do here. And I think they all see this as a jewel of the Bronx.

There were a number of things that we did to make sure that that, in fact, happened. One, we've been attending—and I personally have been attending—community planning board meetings over the last several years. First were around the issue of making sure that this building was actually designed and built and was accepted by this community. There was some level of resistance from the community because of the traffic problems that were going to be created by a new school and a new courthouse.



They were also concerned about the fact of a high school, and there are a lot of negative connotations about high school students and a level of unruliness, I guess, if you will.

And I had to be the person who really went and sold this concept to the community that this was a school of excellence; this was a school where we have really high expectations of the people who were protesting against it would want their sons or daughters to attend. And we did that by bringing our young people out and having them also make presentations about what this was school was about so that the people in the community would have a deeper sense of who we really are and what was going on.

I've met with community leaders for the last several years even as this building was in the design phase.

So, we've gotten buy-in. The district attorney's office is right across the street, and we've opened up our teachers' café to them. And, so, we have assistant district attorneys who come over daily to have lunch here. The court offices come over to have lunch, as well as trying to get their own sons and daughters and nieces and nephews into the school. We get that every single day. And, so, we've opened it up to the people in the community who have taken ownership of the school as well.

When you begin to say that you want to create internship opportunities, you want to create connections with the community, that's not work that you have to do; that's something that you choose to do; and you choose to do that if you have a vision that that will actually be a significant level of value-added for your students. I clearly recognized



that if you forge those kind of partnerships, the opportunities that they can create for young people are simply extraordinary.

So, I was really guided by that passion and by that vision. It's a reach-out-and-touch kind of approach. You've got to make phone calls. You know, I advise urban school leaders all the time. Do you know who your state senator is? Do you know who your city councilperson is? Do you know who your congressperson is? The head of the precinct, police precinct, for this particular community has given me his number. I've brought him into the school.

How often, as urban school leaders, would we think to pick up the phone and call the head of the precinct and invite him in because there's a special function that's taking place at the school. It may not have anything to do with him, but it's a special function, you're bringing in other people from around the community. How often would we think to invite the head of the police precinct to come in and speak to a group of students in school about what he does? See, he's used to being invited in when you have a problem; there was an incident and you need police assistance.

But it makes all the difference in the world when you can develop a rapport with him at a different level, and it shows him that you're thinking about him, as well, in recognizing that nobody wants to be called just for problems all the time.

And, so, we do the same thing with the elected officials, the state assemblymen. We have them come in and speak to our young people. And do you know what happens when they come in? They get on fire for what's happening in the school and what's happening with the young people. And when things come across their desk, other



opportunities, you're the person that they think of and who they want to call and say, Listen, this just came up. I've got about five summer jobs that just came across my desk, and I gotta move on it quickly. Send me five students to my office this afternoon, and we'll take care of them.

Those are opportunities. That's why I do what I do to continue to create opportunities. And when you are creating those opportunities, what you're also creating are opportunities for adults to serve as mentors for young people, which is critical.

I'm a passionate person, but it's easy for me because I'm doing what I think I was really meant to do with my life. You're not just a manager of an institution, but you really are a leader, and, in order to lead, I think you have to have some level of passion. And it has led me to do the kind of work that I'm doing here and have been doing here for seven years. And that same passion has now led me into the next phase, really, of my educational experience, which is going to be assuming the leadership of what I think will be one of the most exciting initiatives anywhere in this country. It is the creation of an all-boys public school that will start here in New York, in the Bronx—the first single-sex, all-boy school in New York in well over 30 years.

When you look at the research, the boys are the ones—and particularly boys of color in the intercity—are the ones who are on the bottom of every statistical analysis and all the research that is done. And there have been a host of conferences and books and reports and research; but, really, there is no lab anywhere in this country that's addressing this issue.



So, together with the organization that I'm on the board of directors of, the 100 Black Men of New York, which is now an international organization, we have developed a proposal which has been submitted to the city, has been accepted. We're really going to study the issue of the boys as learners and how do you tap into that potential that has remained untapped for so long, for far too long, for our boys. And what we certainly hope will be an outgrowth of our efforts is that this will be something that will become a national cry and that, perhaps, we'll be in a position to layout the blueprint for how you can develop a successful educational experience for young men.

People, those who are expecting to work with you, and the young people to follow you, they've got to be inspired. Leaders have to inspire people to do what we know is necessary to be done. And you need people to step outside of themselves and to go above and beyond in this journey, and I think that is one that's very, very important; and it's one that I think I've had experience, and a wonderful experience in doing; and I hope to continue to do that.

Emotional & Intellectual Challenges of Urban School Leaders

Baxter Atkinson, President

On the national level when I look at the urban school leadership, it is basically the same as you travel from one district to the other from the standpoint that the challenges are many, the workload is mammoth, and the expectations of our urban school leaders are that they should be able to walk on water, so to speak. Those challenges are such that they are expected to do more with less on a regular basis, and they deal with inordinate



types of responsibilities. And I commend them because they do so well with so little in terms of the resources that are placed at their disposal.

Urban school leadership is certainly a daunting, a daunting task. It is one of the most challenging of all the different careers that I envision. It is such a demanding field, and we face so many obstacles in the course of what we do as urban leaders.

We need to continue to highlight what we do as educators, urban leaders, and look to bring as many resources as possible to the table in order for us to achieve our goals ...

If one came to me seeking my advice as to how to become a successful urban school leader, I would say to that person, first and foremost, be prepared to work 24/7 to move that school forward.

100 Black Men Partnership

Reverend Jacques DeGraff

Hello. I'm delighted to be here. My name is Reverend Jacques DeGraff. I'm with the 100 Black Men. I'm a native of the Bronx, and I've been excited about this project, the Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice, for many years. And, so, when the opportunity came to bring this project to our organization, the 100 Black Men, I was instrumental in creating that partnership.

When we got involved, the 100 Black Men got involved with the Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice because of the concept and community empowerment that it represented. And this project at that time afforded us the opportunity to get involved and have value added to a project. And, so, that the whole concept of a school on a campus of a courthouse and criminal justice complex, which would provide



alternatives for our young people, was so exciting, we knew that we had to play an important role.

Leadership Vision

David Banks is the reason that we got involved. I'm pleased to say that he's not a stranger; I'm the one who put his name in nomination and identified him as the person for the principalship of this school. And I had watched him over the years grow and develop and make a dramatic choice to leave the legal profession to enter into education.

So, one of the things that struck me—and I believe strikes anyone who meets David Banks, and anyone who would really be a successful leader of an urban school, is that they've got to demonstrate commitment.

He had to have a sense of who he is and his heritage and some vision for a school. That's what attracted me. For a principal to make an impact, it means the person has got to get outside of their office. They've got to walk the halls. They've got to meet the parents. They've got to become involved.

And, I think, to be successful, any urban leader has got to recognize that you can't do it by yourself. You've got to have people who bring resources and bring understanding to your situation so that you are value-added. And David has done that with his tenure here as principal.

What we do, and what I do in my role as the coordinator, is we're kind of his big brother. We look out for David, and we look out for this school. They don't always have to come and ask for things. We bring resources to their school. So our relationship with



Rupert Murdoch and News Corporation, we brought to this school. Our relationship in the political arena, we are able to bring those relationships to the school.

If you're writing notes or studying or wondering how it's done, part of it is the integrity of the principal. The principal has got to do a number of things.

One of them, I believe, is the principal has to have an understanding of something that is common in the rest of the world. You've got to remember who your friends are and say thank you every once in a while. Not that we seek that, but it makes the relationship go all that much better.

Secondly, I think that those of us who do this volunteer work, who are involved in public schools, we don't like to get late notice or no notice. We want to be involved, and we understand that you've got to pick up the phone and help explain the issues or what's happening in a timely and a regular fashion. That's an essential ingredient, because I'm coordinating businessmen, professionals, elected officials who are committed to our organization; but they have other priorities and other resources that we've got to integrate into this process.

David's vision includes an expectation that every child can learn; and that every child and family can be accountable; and that when families are accountable and with the expectation that children can learn, that combustible chemistry occurs that attracts outsiders like ourselves who believe that young people can learn. At the foundation of a methodology is the belief that young people can learn. That's empowering.

Secondly, is not a fear of outsiders. Many parents and community-based organizations have come to feel that they're not welcome in our schools. David has gone



out of his way to continually, in meetings uptown and downtown, professionally and socially, to preach the gospel, if you will, of public education. He is able to, through his personality, through the power of his personality, but also through the substance of his message, get people who might not otherwise be involved to play a role.

Collaboration

And then on the critical part of that is to ask people to do that which they can do. If you ask men my age and older to be in a basketball league, then you better have a lot of insurance because of our point in time. But if you ask us to put a position paper on some legislation, maybe put a in call in to the chancellor, speak to the police department; those are the things that we can do. If you ask us to go out and pass the hat and raise some money, we can do that. If you ask for some suits for young men who are going to job interviews, we can provide that.

If you match the need to what our abilities are, that takes a thoughtfulness that's not always there. Some people indiscriminately ask for help, and they ask for it all the time; and it becomes a draining relationship. David has the temperament and the judgment to know what to ask and when and how to ask. He involves our men in the school, and they like that, they enjoy it, and they begin to understand and look at public education in a different way.

And, so, to get people involved in schools, you've got to build bridges and remove barriers so that people can participate in a meaningful way. That's not easy. We now, in a multicultural society, we have people from different backgrounds, people with different economic needs and circumstances, the family is different than it has been in



previous years; and, so, when you put all of these elements together, you've got to prepare the people who would come in to assist you in your school by giving them information and saying, This is what to expect in this circumstance.

In this particular school, it took a little to get our young people settled down. You had to command their attention. It takes some coaching, it takes a little input, but it's doable. But you have to be briefed on that. Otherwise, it's an unsatisfactory experience.

And, so, to be successful, I believe, in bringing outside resources into schools is, again, you have to be a conscience bridge builder. You've got to help understand where someone is and help them get them to where you need them to be.

Understanding School Function

One of the things that outside agencies often have a difficult time understanding, and one of the things that a true school leader in an urban setting must do, is to help the well-intentioned, community-based organizations understand the system in which the school functions.

People need to understand that any particular school functions within a department of education and where it fits – that people report to other people; that there are laws governing relationships, and there's accountability. And, therefore, you can't just come in and do anything when you're in a school building, no matter what your intentions are. In order to be effective, we have to understand what the educational process and vision is in a particular school, and the procedures that go along with it.

In the beginning, when David was first principal, we were frustrated because we couldn't always get a return phone call when we wanted a return phone call because he



had to go to meetings with the superintendent, he had to fill out paperwork about what was happening in his school with his teachers. He had to work on teacher development.

Those are things that people don't readily come to public schools and volunteerism and understand. They have to be explained to us, and they have to be demonstrated. When they are, we get it; but somebody has got to say that.

Passion & Commitment

The whole notion of passion and commitment is an essential ingredient to being a successful urban leader in a public school, in my opinion. When you have passion for what you're doing, it's visible; it's tangible; you can see it, and you can feel it. And that's what David Banks brings to his commitment for education. The flame that burns within David is evident, whether he's talking to a parent, or the superintendent, or a professor, or a new student, or interviewing a potential student. It's visible. It's something that people can see with the naked eye and feel within.

You cannot underestimate or undervalue the importance of passion, because passion is what the rest of us seek. We run towards people who are passionate and bring an excitement to their endeavor. David Banks has done that through his involvements in the community. He raises his hand. He makes contributions. He volunteers and completes assignments. So that when he came here, and we saw that he was here, we said that that's the kind of principal we want to build our legacy on.

Community leadership and school leadership, I think that they are inseparable. A successful urban school, in my view, cannot exist in a vacuum. There are too many forces that impact on the young people in a school that the school must help them in



addressing, and help their families. The school that empowers our young people empowers the community, and they see the benefit.

When this building was opened, we stood on the corner and asked the community to raise their hands and take a pledge to respect this building, to not vandalize it or deface it, and not allow others to vandalize or deface it. And people who live across the street and in blocks in this area around raised their hand on television and said we do swear.

That's the kind of excitement and involvement that a good urban leader understands and creates. And, so, David Banks understands that for the community to be involved they've got to be respected; they've got to be spoken to; they've got to be communicated with and listened to.

The 100 Black Men and our legacy project—we wanted to build something that would last; and, so, we came up with the notion to create a school for young men that would have as its hallmark academic excellence and character development. And, so, we came up with the Eagle Academy, because the issue for us is beyond education. It's about the fact that young men and men of color in our city and across this country are under siege and are not doing well, and the system has not done well in addressing their needs and concerns.

When you take on a daunting challenge like that, when you throw the precedence aside and seek to make new ground, you need a one-of-a-kind principal. But we needed someone who had a vision and a passion, who believed in our young men and believed in the what could be, who saw beyond the what is. That's the magic, that's the promise, that's the hope of the Eagle Academy. David, in my opinion, embodies that. And when



you see David in action, you see a hundred percent all the time. And that inspires; that motivates; that exemplifies for our members and for the community that we are what we say we are.

And the notion, I believe, for those who would head urban schools is that we need to think outside the box. We need to build on our heritage. We need to get people excited about learning again and believing in our young people; and then seeing ourselves as part of the process. It's not something that we can bring our children to the schoolhouse door and wait for them in four years and hope that they made it. That model is gone.

The model that is involved for the 21st Century in urban schools is that we, the community, have got to get involved. If you or anyone would come to me who is seeking the support of the 100 Black Men or any organization that I was a part of, and you wanted our involvement, what would I be looking for? That's a question that we get asked an awful lot.

We're looking for something that you can't put on a chart; that it's not a regular checklist, but it's very definable. We're looking for vision. We're looking that you see something that doesn't presently exist, but you also see how get there from here.

The most specific quality is the capacity to articulate your vision. We want you to make us see the invisible. And, so, that capacity to communicate through your excitement, your belief and your desire needs to be able to reach other people so that they can buy into your views.



The essential ingredient in the decision for a community-based organization really gets down to who's the leader of the school. Who is the leader of that school? Who is that individual that we can go to? One, for accountability.

For an organization accountability is vital. We've got to see that there's somebody who we can go to who owns the vision; who says, See me. If things are not working, come see me. If things need to get better, come see me. If the train has gotten off the track, come see me. That's what we're looking for.

And then we're seeking somebody who is saying, This is where we're going. We are going to do these things to get to there. And when we get there, these young people will have these skills; they'll be empowered in this way.

So, that's the package that we're looking for. We're looking for someone who is multidimensional, who has involvement in the community, who has a capacity to listen and implement and to take feedback, integrate other's ideas and also sees the importance of having a team.

Health & Human Services

**Eric Weingartner, Assistant Vice President for Education Youth Services, FEGS
Aaron Barnette, Coordinator**

By: Eric Weingartner

I am Eric Weingartner, and I'm the Assistant Vice President for Education Youth Services at FEGS, Health and Human Services System. And I manage 15 education youth services programs across New York City and Long Island.

FEGS is a very large health and human services not-for-profit that has reached across the five boroughs of New York and Long Island and serves over 70,000 clients



annually in a range of social service programs including behavioral health; programs for the mentally retarded, developmentally disabled, welfare-to-work population and education youth services.

By: Aaron Barnette

And my name is Aaron Barnette. I'm Coordinator of the FEGS In-School Youth Employment Program here at the Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice. As part of our program, we service 94 students; and we provide a variety of services which include tutorial services, vocational preparation, college preparation, as well as a variety of club activities.

By: Eric Weingartner

There are really two primary ways that CBOs can engage public schools; either through private grants, through foundations or through federal, state or city levied money, where RFPs are released and CBOs can respond to partner with schools to provide services that in many ways are the services that are not pedagogical, nine to three. It's everything that is not instruction during the day.

For FEGS, and for myself, and for the colleagues that I work with our major attention is to respond to proposals that we think that we can do well, and partner with schools where their reaction to having a CBO come onboard and come into the building to work with their staff is one where there would be some sort of systemic inclusion of how do you get a CBO to leverage their services, and what they do well to benefit where the school and the CBO services could, in effect, come together.



So, the question is, really, schools have budgets to be able to do X; and CBOs, in effect, bring the Y. But the key to being able to be successful in providing those types of services is to be paired with a building and, in effect, an urban leader that really recognizes that the contribution of a CBO is only going to be powerful and systemic if they're really, really brought into the fabric of a school building.

And, so, from our perspective, David Banks is a master at that, because he recognizes that FECS has an opportunity and a level of expertise that's able to really contribute to what is his overall mission – which is empowering kids to be successful; be academically rigorous and broaden their scope; and, from an extracurricular perspective, to be able to be real, true leaders themselves.

So, for us, the linchpin to actually being able to be really, really successful in the school building is finding that type of collaborative relationship. And for Mr. Banks, it's been really total synergy in that he understands what we are good at; he understands what we need to be successful. David understands that, and he basically gives us the latitude and the guidance to be able to figure out how to really incorporate what we do into the fabric of a building.

By: Aaron Barnette

We've been able to work very well together to provide great services for students. David Banks has always been very supportive of whatever venture we've taken on. He's always provided us with additional staff as needed, and he's just a great partner to have in providing the quality services for kids throughout New York.

By: Eric Weingartner



And, so, in order for us to really be able to be successful, we need to be able to tap into David's total vision for how the school works and have our services be leveraged in concert with what the services are that happen in the building.

Aaron and I sat down with David—I think two days ago—to say, What worked this year? What do you want to see next year? And the conversation wasn't about this is what you have to do; it's about you're part of this building, you're part of what I think is critical for kids' success; what do you think? Let's brainstorm. And it was really a free-flowing conversation about what do you think FECS can bring to this building, and here are my needs. And that is the exact kind of partnership that a CBO should try and navigate. And we're very fortunate that David helps us do that. Because David's leadership allows us to be successful.

By: Aaron Barnette

David Banks really has incorporated us into the fabric of this school. And that is the key to the successful relationship.

By: Eric Weingartner:

David understands exactly how to run a building. He understands that it's his job to recruit resources that compliment what are the department of education's tax levy allocation to what he has. And that's a big deal, and a part of why he's been successful.

I think a lot of what we have been able to do that's been powerful for kids has been based on David being critical with us and asking us to be critical thinkers about what are the problems and what are the resources that we could bring to the table. And he facilitates our ability to be able to do that in his building. He's our partner, and that's empowering in and of itself.

By: Aaron Barnette:

The one thing that I see and notice about David is that his focus is strictly on the success of the students. And I think that's the one thing that makes him stand out to the



students and the staff is that he's very genuine with his message to you, very energetic, very upbeat, very optimistic.

And one other thing that I want to mention, we talked about David Banks really bringing us as an organization into the fabric of this school. He has an advisory council that meets on a daily basis, and he asked me to be a part of that advisory council. And by him doing so, that really showed me that he wants us as an organization to truly be a part of the day-to-day activities that go on in this school. And that was just a huge gesture on his part to really bring us in and include us on the administrative decisions that are made in this school. That was a big thing.

By: Eric Weingartner

I agree. I think that was a really telling point. And he values Aaron like a colleague, and that's exactly how we expect that principals will respond to us; and, frankly, from Aaron's perspective and in his own professional development, it makes it empowering to come to work every day.