

Turnaround School Program Culminating Ceremony



On Tuesday, December 4th, participants in the district's *Turnaround School Program*, gathered at the district office for a culminating "debriefing" of sorts, and to celebrate the outcomes of this major three year \$1.5 million grant-based program which began in early 2015.

Phase I of The Turnaround School Program utilized a cohort of *School Leadership Professors* from Seton Hall University who guided, coached and mentored a select group of both aspiring and seated district administrators on their path to excellence at School Improvement Grant (SIG) and SIG eligible "turnaround schools."

Phase II of the program involved the creation of interactive video simulations used for professional development purposes. Dr. Dale Mann, professor emeritus from Columbia University and managing director of Interactive, Inc., was Paterson's technical partner in this phase of the project. Much of the technical crew, producers, actors, and assistants were district staff working on a volunteer basis. During his speech Dr. Mann stated, "I have worked in many countries and I have made a lot of simulations. When I was told that I would be working with volunteers here in Paterson, I will admit that I was very worried – but I was wrong! The talent here is in the national leadership class."

The final product features a virtual school that through a web-based video simulation requires aspiring leaders to confront real-world challenges, make choices, and then reflect on the consequences of their actions. As the district moves forward, these simulations will be used to help identify administrators who may be effective turn-around leaders. Further, through this state-of-the-art, next generation tool, Paterson Public Schools has created a national model for professional leadership training in education. One more step towards realizing our vision of being a leader in urban education.

Following the debriefing, attendees enjoyed dinner and refreshments. Acting Chief Special Education Officer, Ms. Cheryl Coy and her staff oversaw the entire grant project locally, and coordinated the evening's meeting and festivities.

A Framework to Keep Students in Class at STEM

Among a number of initiatives that The School of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) at JFK, they have engaged *teacher mentors* to enhance student "accountability and resiliency." The school's percentage of chronically absent students is currently down to 26.3% (It is important to note that STEM ended the 2016-2017 school year with 53% of the entire student body being chronically absent).



Here are some of the things happening at STEM to address student attendance:

- Teacher mentoring of students;
- Automated phone calls home to chronically absent students after every 10th day of school;
- Awarding "0 period" to students who are consistently on time and in school;
- Incentivizing field trips whereby only students with attendance and grades in good standing can attend trips;
- Holding students accountable in the classrooms;
- Implementing student "grit and resiliency" strategies into the school-wide action plan and focus (For more information on this, [look at the work of Angela Duckworth](#)), and,
- Rebranding of the school as the "Original STEM Academy."

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