

CHARTER LEADERS OF COLOR **MATTER.**

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Principal

Perry Street Prep Public Charter School



I grew up in Chicago, and I have always loved working with kids. But it wasn't until I was a college student at Howard University in Washington, DC, that I was exposed to young kids, black and brown like me, who did not have access to many of the resources that I had been fortunate to have as a child. I volunteered at Bruce-Monroe Elementary School, a traditional public elementary school near Howard, and this was the very first time I saw firsthand that there were kids who couldn't read on grade level. I thought everyone could. When confiding in my mom, she wisely advised, "DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!" So I became a teacher. I changed my major from Math & Computer Science to Math & Education.

Early in my career, one of the places I chose to teach was a juvenile detention facility in DC. The challenge there was not discipline-related nor even education-related—it was that our students had to deal with a lot of stressors: homesickness, safety concerns, etc. In this environment and later at Perry Street Prep, it was essential to provide continuous support. When I was interviewing for the Principal position at Perry Street, I arrived to students in hallways hanging on lockers, cursing, and screaming. Re-enrollment was only 50%, attendance was extremely low, as were all other measures of success. I was nervous. But when decision time came, I thought, "Who else better to do this than me?"

OUR TURNAROUND STORY

Perry Street was Tier 3 and on the brink of closure in 2015. In October of 2019—for the first time—Perry Street Prep was announced as a Tier 1 school. Perry Street Prep continues to demonstrate strong student outcomes for students with learning disabilities (At the 3+ level, in math and ELA, results exceed averages for DC schools). The DC average for Math is 22%, and at Perry Street Prep the average for Math is at 39%. The DC average for ELA is 20%, and at Perry Street Prep the average for ELA is 42%.

Talent management has been absolutely essential to this success and is my #1 priority as principal. Talent management can be the thing that brings a Tier 3 school up to Tier 1. I've interviewed over 200 teachers to find the right staff for Perry Street Prep. Our school is also data driven, and our leadership team reviews and analyses school data together on a weekly basis. We continuously use this information to help us make collective and individual decisions that optimize our teaching methods. We all share a commitment at Perry Street to doing whatever it takes to help every student succeed. Four years ago, I had a student with extreme behavioral issues. Talent management was essential to our ability to serve him—and he went from tossing tables and flipping chairs to receiving straight As and the Principal's Award. To help this student and others with special needs, we created a small, multi-age classroom with differentiated curriculum, led by one traditional educator and one behavioral specialist. Having the right people in place to understand students' needs and differentiate curriculum was essential to Perry Street's turn-around.

MY VOICE, MY ROLE

Because I'm black, I understand the urgency of how important it is that teachers teach from bell to bell, differentiate instruction, and build relationships. Without the basis of a strong K-12 education that shows students different options for their future, black and brown kids who look just like me are at risk for a trajectory of joblessness, jail, or drugs. I'm charged with giving our students hope through providing high-quality education at Perry Street. I am charged with making sure that I see it through. As we look to the future, successful charter school leaders of color are uniquely qualified to help shape an abundant, equitable public-school system. Data consistently shows that kids who are taught by people who look like them do better. I also see that, generally speaking, educators are more rigorous with students who look like them. The single hardest thing to do in education is to turn a school from Tier 3 to Tier 1. If a charter school leader of color has done this, then we need their insights and talent as we work together to create the very best educational experiences for all of our children.

"That's what we're here to provide—hope and resources so that these students can do what they want as they get older. And I understand that—because I'm black, I feel charged with seeing that through."

PERRY STREET PREP

Location	Washington, DC
Year Opened	1999
Student enrollment	415
Grades served	PreK-8
Website	www.pspdc.org



Student Demographics

Asian	0%		
Black/African-American	89%		
White/Caucasian	0%		
Hispanic/Latino	11%	Homeless Youth	16%
Two or More Races	0%	At Risk Students	51%
		Students with Disabilities	13%
		ESL Students	11%