



PHILADELPHIA
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LEADERS

Providing a Space to Dream

Kelley School principal draws on past to create bridge for students' future

Amelia Coleman Brown was an adult before she fully appreciated her mother's dedication to providing her with an education.

"I realize now the sacrifice my mother made for me - making sure I had books and encyclopedias, sending me to a boarding school, away from my six siblings, my friends, and the only neighborhood I knew, as she worked to protect me from any bad influences and give me a better chance at a successful future," Brown said. "She made great sacrifices in order to ensure that my siblings and I had opportunities she never had to become successful."

With a two-decade career in public education, Brown has an abundance of professional experience. But her personal history strongly guides her approach as Principal of Philadelphia's William D. Kelley Elementary School.

Brown, a current Neubauer Fellow in Educational Leadership, worked as a literacy teacher for several years at a West Philadelphia school, then served as a vice principal at a Chester charter school before taking leadership of William D. Kelley Elementary School. She always knew she wanted to be a teacher, and believed she could make a difference for students.

"I always loved school," she said. "I loved my teachers and reading and always knew I wanted to someday work in education. I became a teacher because my personal educational experiences were great. My teachers cared! They helped me to connect new knowledge to my heart and my mind. I wanted other minorities to experience great learning and truly be prepared to become productive citizens, in spite of their circumstances. I wanted, as many children, including ones that looked like me, the brown ones from poverty stricken neighborhoods, to experience great learning experiences."

Kelley Elementary is located in Philadelphia's Brewerytown neighborhood, which, despite recent economic development, still struggles with deep-seated poverty.

Addressing inequity

Brown's desire for improvement continues to drive her to learn and challenge herself. One of

her great motivators, she said, is knowing that many students are disadvantaged through poverty and that great inequity exists in the nation's public school system.

"We have a moral and professional obligation to do whatever it takes to make sure students in the community get what they need," she said. "I believe that all students have the right to a high-level learning experience that will provide them with sound opportunities to become successful citizens. I believe that if an educator decides to serve a particular population of students it becomes their moral and professional obligation to ensure that they fulfill their commitment to that school community."

Brown fosters a nurturing environment and emphasizes the need to strive for equity in public education.

Paint a picture of optimism

"It takes a comprehensive approach, advocating for students and motivating the school team with the limited amount of hours in a day and limited resources," she said. "We work to paint a picture of optimism. The ultimate goal of a high-achieving school should be that all students are provided with the opportunity to reach their full potential. All stakeholders should be a part of develop-

ing and implementing such a shared vision of teaching and learning. Students have an obligation to learn, teachers to teach, and parents to ultimately support the role of both teacher and learner."

Brown is continually seeking professional development and working with her peers

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to find the strongest learning opportunities. After speaking with a number of contemporaries who experienced the benefits and long-term connections of the Neubauer Fellowship, she chose to apply and began the leadership development program in the summer of 2016.

“I have appreciated the chance to learn from people who aren’t directly connected to my space,” she said. “We have to think more globally, if we truly want to have an impact on public education across our city and ensure that every child has an opportunity to attend a quality school in their neighborhood, and the Neubauer experience has helped me do that as a school leader.”

Every day, Brown sees students she knows face many of the challenges she was able to overcome.

If I can do it, so can you

“I share my story with students, in hopes to inspire their greatness. I want to be a reminder to my community that if I can do it, so can you, you can work hard, get smarter, and choose and live your destiny too,” she said.

“Some of our students don’t even have a space to dream. They are going through such a rough time, they don’t have that comfortable space to even escape into a book. There’s too much chaos and drama. So at our school, we work to provide our scholars with a caring environment that helps them to recognize that they are super capable of becoming smart, and if they work really hard they will be able to compete with their peers, everywhere, and not just in North Philadelphia, in spite of their circumstances.”