

**EDUCATE.**

**EMPOWER.**

**REFORM.**



**STUDENTSFIRSTNY PARENT CONVENTION • AUGUST 10, 2013**

**“EDUCATION IS THE  
MOST POWERFUL WEAPON  
WHICH YOU CAN USE TO  
CHANGE THE WORLD.”**

**- NELSON MANDELA**

## DEAR FAMILIES,

Because of you, StudentsFirstNY has a team of community organizers building relationships and hosting chapter meetings in 16 of the lowest performing school districts in the Bronx, northern Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn. We have successfully opened two field offices.

While I'm sure you've seen our two dozen canvassers across the city, in just a year we have grown to the largest education reform organizing effort in the state. We have talked to over 300,000 New Yorkers since July 2012. Organizers have held over 6,000 one-on-one conversations with traditional district school parents. We have held successful school safety and bullying campaigns in Brownsville, East New York, and Crown Heights.

Our chapters continue to host weekly chapter meetings across the City with parents like you on teacher quality and school choice. Together we've spoken out against the status quo, we won teacher evaluations, and we've stood with our partners on local issues that matter most. We have successfully elected reform parents to local CECs, spoke at PEP hearings, penned editorials, protested for quality teachers in low income communities of color, and attended commission hearings.

I want to thank you all for standing with us this year. I want to thank you all for sitting in church basements, crowding in library rooms, standing on the steps of Tweed, sitting in school auditoriums, and most of all believing in the incremental change of education reform organizing. I want to thank you for continuing to believe in the organizing team as we embark on transformational policy changes together. StudentsFirst NY is committed to organizing, and most of all, we are committed to you.

As a Brooklyn public school parent, I'm so happy that you are on this journey with us to reform, empower, and inform. I look forward to another successful year together.



**TENICKA BOYD**  
Director of Organizing,  
StudentsFirstNY

# AGENDA

10:00AM

10:00 - 10:30 AM  
**Registration and Breakfast**

11:00AM

10:45 - 11:15 AM  
**Opening Plenary**  
Geoffrey Canada, StudentsFirstNY Board  
Member & Founder of Harlem Children's Zone

11:30 AM - 12:30 PM  
**Session I Workshops**

12:00PM

1:00PM

12:45 - 1:45 PM  
**Lunch Plenary**  
George Parker,  
StudentsFirst  
National Fellow

2:00PM

2:00 - 3:00 PM  
**Session II Workshops**

3:00PM

3:15 - 4:00 PM  
**Closing Plenary**  
Dr. Floyd H. Flake,  
Senior Pastor of Greater  
Allen A. M. E. Cathedral  
of New York

4:00PM

**Paul Vallas,**  
Superintendent of  
Bridgeport Schools

Todos los estudiantes  
Necesitan excelentes profesores  
Sin importar donde vivan  
Mejores profesores  
Mejores escuelas  
Escuela Distrito #10

School  
District #10  
All Students  
Regardless of Zipcode  
Deserve quality teachers!  
Better Teachers, Better Schools

BETTER  
TEACHERS  
BETTER SCHOOLS

The union for students  
Students First

Better Teachers  
+  
Better Schools  
=  
Better Bed-Stuy  
It's simple math...

Black and Hispanic  
Students are affected  
the most as they  
face the toughest  
educational restrictions

Quality Education!

Better Teachers  
Better Schools!



IT'S TIME  
TO PUT  
STUDENTS  
FIRST.

Be  
Teach

## SESSION I WORKSHOPS

### PARENTS MOBILIZING FOR EMPOWERMENT | ROOM 601

All families should be able to choose among quality schools. No student should be forced to attend a low-performing school or be taught by a low-performing teacher. In this session, panelists will discuss how New York should provide meaningful school performance information and how parents can be involved in turning around failing schools.

#### MODERATOR

**Glen Weiner**, StudentsFirstNY

#### PARTICIPANTS

**RiShawn Biddle**, DropOut Nation

**Shirley Ford**, Parent Revolution

**Carrie Remis**, Parent Power Project

### WHY HIGH PERFORMING CHARTERS MATTER / SCHOOL CHOICE 101 | ROOM 603

New York should provide greater choice options within its public school system. In this session, panelists will discuss how New York can create access to quality charters by removing its arbitrary cap on charter schools and creating a streamlined replication process for schools that can clearly demonstrate a track record of high performance.

#### MODERATOR

**Kevin Chavous**, America Federation for Children

#### PARTICIPANTS

**Sharhonda Bossier**, Families for Excellent Schools

**Valerie Babb**, Charter Parent Action Network

**Genevieve Foster**, Success Academy

**Natasha Shannon**, Success Academy

## **GETTING YOUR CHILD'S SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS MET | ROOM 602**

This panel will discuss and seek to provide guidance for navigating the citywide special education system. This panel will discuss behavior support programs for students who are on the autism spectrum, have significant cognitive delays, are severely emotionally challenged, sensory impaired and/or multiply disabled.

### **MODERATOR**

**Ben Lazarus**, StudentsFirstNY

### **PARTICIPANTS**

**Nathalie Elivert**, StudentsFirstNY

**Jasmine Velazquez**, NYC Special Education Administrator

### THE IMPORTANCE OF PHASING OUT FAILING SCHOOLS | ROOM 601

New York parents should hear from experts who understand why approving new schools to replace failing schools and providing co-location options can increase the quality of schools options. In this session, panelists will discuss how New York can create parent leaders to advocate for turning around low-performing schools by establishing laws that would include clear timelines and provide for statewide regulations on process to prevent inappropriate district interference with parent efforts.

#### MODERATOR

**Raysa Rodriguez**, StudentsFirstNY

#### PARTICIPANTS

**Josiah Young**, StudentsFirst

**Daniel Weisberg**, TNTP

**Kevin Chavous**, American Federation for Children

## TEACHER QUALITY 101 | ROOM 603

New York has made progress and is strong in some aspects of this area, but it is still behind when it comes to ensuring effective teachers and principals are retained and rewarded by districts. New York requires districts to evaluate educators on a framework that significantly weighs student growth as an indicator of classroom effectiveness and incorporates other key measures. In this session, panelists will discuss how tenure, teacher placement and ineffective teacher evaluations affect the quality of education in New York City schools.

### MODERATOR

**Campbell Brown**, Parents' Transparency Project

### PARTICIPANTS

**Nathalie Elivert**, StudentsFirstNY

**Hope Lesane**, Teach for America NYC

**Caroline Roth**, Achievement First

**Dolly Chugh**, New York University

## IMPROVING SCHOOL SAFETY | ROOM 602

Many parents are concerned about school violence and bullying. As unwanted, aggressive behavior in schools and in neighborhoods increases, parents are mobilizing communities to create safe havens. In this session, panelists will discuss concrete steps to eliminate threats and attacks.

### MODERATOR

**Sara Alwan**, StudentsFirstNY

### PARTICIPANTS

**Keoni Wright**, StudentsFirstNY Parent

**Douglas Covington**, StudentsFirstNY Parent

**Aaron Hinton**, StudentsFirstNY Parent

**Miriama Diallo**, StudentsFirstNY Student



### GEOFFREY CANADA

Geoffrey Canada is the president and chief executive officer of Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), a network of charter schools that serves 8,000 New York City students. Mr. Canada is also a member of the StudentsFirstNY board.

Mr. Canada joined HCZ in 1983 and assumed his current role in 1990. In 1997, the agency launched the Harlem Children's Zone Project, which provides educational, social and medical services for 10,000 children from birth through college.

Growing up in a poor, sometimes violent neighborhood in the South Bronx, Mr. Canada drew from his childhood experiences to write two books: "Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History of Violence in America," published in 1995 by Beacon Press, and "Reaching Up for Manhood: Transforming the Lives of Boys in America," published in 1998 by Beacon Press.

In his 30 years with Harlem Children's Zone, Inc., Mr. Canada, who has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Bowdoin College and a master's degree in education from the Harvard School of Education, has become nationally recognized for his pioneering work helping children and families in Harlem and as a passionate advocate for education reform.

The work of Mr. Canada and HCZ has become a national model and has been the subject of many profiles in the media. Their work has been featured on "60 Minutes," "The Oprah Winfrey Show," "The Today Show," "Black in America 2," "This American Life," "Good Morning America," "Nightline," "The Charlie Rose Show," as well in articles in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, The New York Daily News, USA Today and Newsday.

For his years of work advocating for children and families in some of America's most devastated communities, Mr. Canada was a recipient of the first Heinz Award in 1994. In 2004, he was given the Harold W. McGraw Jr. Prize in Education and Child Magazine's Children's Champion Award. In October 2005, he was named one of "America's Best Leaders" by U.S. News and World Report.

In 2006, he was selected by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg as co-chair of The Commission on Economic Opportunity, which was asked to formulate a plan to significantly reduce poverty.

In 2009, he received the Independent Sector's John W. Gardner Leadership Award. He was named to *Time Magazine's* "Time 100" list of the world's most-influential people in 2011 and the Harvard Graduate School of Education Medal for Educational Impact in 2012. In 2012, he was appointed by Governor Andrew Cuomo to the New York Education Reform Commission.



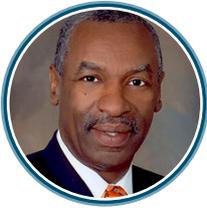
### GEORGE PARKER

George Parker, a 30-year veteran math teacher of the DC public school system, is a Senior Fellow for StudentsFirst. Mr. Parker is the former president of the Washington Teachers' Union, elected to that post in 2005. During this tenure as president, Mr. Parker worked with StudentsFirst CEO and Founder Michelle Rhee to negotiate a groundbreaking collective bargaining agreement that featured innovations in teacher compensation, professional development and equity in classroom resources. The agreement was rooted in accountability, while respecting teachers as true professionals and providing them the technology and classroom resources needed to successfully teach all children.

As a Senior Fellow, Mr. Parker, who has a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics from North Carolina Central University and a Master's in School Administration from Trinity University, assists in training teachers to become education leaders within their schools. He also provides teachers guidance on how to engage other teachers in the education reform movement. Mr. Parker frequently serves as an expert witness in support of legislation aimed to improve teacher quality and elevate the teaching profession. He also engages community organizations and serves on panels across the country to discuss policies such as teacher and principal evaluations, seniority-based layoffs, and union reform.

A black and white photograph of a young boy with a serious expression, holding a large white sign. He is wearing a dark t-shirt and dark pants. Behind him, other people are visible, some holding signs. One sign in the background has the word 'READ!' written on it. The boy's sign reads: 'Bed-Stuy Students Deserve the right to Read!'.

Bed-Stuy Students  
Deserve the right  
to Read!



### DR. FLOYD H. FLAKE

Former U.S. Congressman, the Reverend Dr. Floyd H. Flake is the senior pastor of the more than 20,000-member Greater Allen A. M. E. Cathedral of New York in Jamaica, Queens, and President of Wilberforce University in Ohio. During his 31-year pastorate, Allen has become one of the nation's foremost Christian churches and development corporations. The church and its subsidiary corporations operate with an annual budget of over \$34 million. The church also owns expansive commercial and residential developments; a 750-student private school founded by Flake and his wife Elaine, and various commercial and social service enterprises, which has placed it among the nation's most productive religious and urban development institutions. The corporations, church administrative offices, school, and ministries comprise one of the Borough of Queens' largest private sector employers.

Flake served eleven years in the U.S. Congress, and was a member of the Banking and Finance, and The Small Business Committees. He established a reputation for bipartisan, innovative legislative initiatives to revitalize urban commercial and residential communities. Most notably, the Community Development Financial Institutions Act of 1993 contained provisions named the Bank Enterprise Act (BEA), authored by Rep. Flake, which provided incentives for financial institutions to make market-oriented investments in destabilized urban and rural economies. These BEA provisions along with the Community Development Fund Initiative (CDFI) continue to yield millions of dollars worth of direct and secondary investment for residential and commercial growth.

The Greater Allen Cathedral's operations are a national paradigm of church-centered, faith based, public/private community educational and economic development. Further, Allen's administrative structure, efficiency, and development efforts have increasingly attracted international and national recognition in print and electronic media. He and the church have been profiled on CNN, CBS, BET, C-Span, PBS, and in *Time*, *Black Enterprise*, *Ebony*, the *New York Times*, *Readers Digest*, *Los Angeles Times*, and many other publications. He is a proponent of quality education and market-oriented community and economic development through speeches and lectures in corporate settings, policy forums, seminaries and divinity schools and countless other forums. He is an international lecturer and speaker and teaches at the Harvard Divinity School's Annual Summer Leadership Institute. Under the Rev. Flake's leadership, and true to its Christian doctrine of self-help and communal responsibility, Allen Church has provided resources and guidance for innumerable faith-based and secular institutions. Its net assets are valued at over \$100 million.

Dr. Flake earned a Doctor of Ministry Degree (D.Min.) from the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, OH and holds a B.A. from Wilberforce University with additional studies at Payne Theological Seminary and Northeastern University School of Business. He also has numerous honorary degrees including: Boston University, Fisk University, Lincoln University (PA), and Cheney State (PA).

Rev. Flake authored a best-selling book, "The Way of the Bootstrapper: Nine Action Steps for Achieving Your Dreams." He and his wife, Elaine co-authored the book, "Practical Virtues: Everyday Values and Devotions for African American Families", published by Harper Collins. His latest book the "African American Church Management Handbook", published by Judson Press was released in December 2005.

The Flakes are the parents of four children.



### PAUL VALLAS

Paul Vallas, Superintendent of Bridgeport, Conn. Schools, is known across the education sector for his leadership in reforming and rebuilding school districts in the wake of both natural and man-made disasters. He recently completed his tenure as Superintendent of the Recovery School District of Louisiana, a statewide turnaround district that has successfully reformed the public schools in post-Katrina New Orleans. Under his leadership, schools destroyed by the 2005 hurricane have been rebuilt or relocated, in an unprecedented school construction program that will – for the first time ever – put every public school child in New Orleans in a first-class building and that includes a successful charter school component. Additionally, during this reconstruction period, he has raised student test scores for three straight years at a rate that exceeds that of comparable test scores in the state of Louisiana.

In 2010, concurrent with his responsibilities in New Orleans, Mr. Vallas was appointed to two large international projects. In the first, he served as the lead education consultant to the Government of Haiti (GOH) in the wake of the Jan. 12 earthquake. He is advising the GOH as its Ministry of Education as it seeks to create a publicly subsidized school system that will make education accessible to all of Haiti's children. This five-year, \$4 billion effort will include the construction or reconstruction of 4,000 schools, the training of tens of thousands of teachers, the improvement of the university system and the implementation of early childhood and special needs education programs.

In the second project, Mr. Vallas assumed the responsibility for turning around and improving test scores in 1,100 of Chile's lowest performing schools. Based on this invitation, and his work in Haiti, Mr. Vallas formed The Vallas Group, Inc. He has recruited a world-class team of educational experts with specific expertise in all functional areas of education including curriculum and instruction, teacher training and re-training, student and teacher assessments and interventions, and organizational and finance management. Mr. Vallas' management of the project in Chile is ongoing: After just six months, enormous institutional changes have been achieved, and the schools are beginning to see the results of his work.

Before his tenure in New Orleans and his work abroad, Mr. Vallas served as the Chief Executive Officer of the Philadelphia and Chicago School Districts.

Mr. Vallas' wide-ranging experience has led him to believe that any school system, whether a domestic district or an international nationwide system, can be reformed -- in spite of natural or manmade disaster, troubled finances, poorly trained teachers or political and community disunity.

## PANELISTS



**VALERIE BABB** is the Director of the Charter Parent Network for the New York City Charter School Center. In this role, she is responsible for organizing and training charter school parents to effectively advocate on behalf of their children and their schools. Her work includes coordinating letter-writing and petition campaigns, facilitating meetings between parents and lawmakers, and promoting the Charter Center and charter schools at community events. In 2010, she helped deliver nearly 3,000 parents to Albany for Advocacy Day. Before joining the Charter Center, Valerie worked in fundraising and strategic relations for the Abyssinian Development Corporation and in business development at the law firm Jones Day. Ms. Babb has a background in media and was a radio talk show host for five years. She is a charter school parent and a graduate of City College.



**RISHAWN BIDDLE** is Editor and Publisher of "Dropout Nation" -- the leading commentary website on education reform -- a columnist for "The American Spectator," award-winning editorialist, speechwriter, communications consultant and education policy advisor. More importantly, he is a tireless advocate for improving the quality of K-12 education for every child. The co-author of "A Byte at the Apple: Rethinking Education Data for the Post-NCLB Era," Mr. Biddle combines journalism, research and advocacy to bring insight on the nation's education crisis and rally families and others to reform American public education.

Before founding "Dropout Nation," Mr. Biddle was an editorial writer for the *Indianapolis Star* covering education and urban affairs. There, he wrote and oversaw three award-winning special projects revealing the depths of the nation's dropout crisis and exposing judicial abuse against alleged juvenile offenders. Before becoming a tireless editorialist for school reform, Mr. Biddle was a reporter for such publications as *Forbes*, worked on news documentaries for ABC News and reported on government and crime for newspapers in Atlanta, GA.



**SHARHONDA BOSSIER** is the Deputy Director at Families for Excellent Schools (FES), a non-profit whose mission is to organize and mobilize families in support of aggressive education reform. FES trains, equips, and supports parents to participate in a coordinated advocacy campaign that fights for every family's right—especially families in poverty— to choose an excellent school. As Deputy Director, Ms. Bossier manages FES' New York-based campaign work, leads their parent training efforts and guides the executive team's work together.

Ms. Bossier said her work gives her the opportunity to help parents discover, tap into and exercise their power to affect meaningful change in their communities and in the lives of their children.

Ms. Bossier's professional career began in education as a high school social science teacher in 2005. In 2010, she joined the staff of Democracy Builders as the Brooklyn Borough Director. She joined FES in July 2011. Ms. Bossier has Bachelors degrees in Legal Studies and Politics and a Masters degree in Education all from the University of Santa Cruz.

Education Week named Ms. Bossier one of the “Ten People Who Are Changing Education Today—And Will Be Ten Years From Now” for her work with Families for Excellent Schools, and the work she will do in the future.

A California native, Ms. Bossier currently resides in Brooklyn with her family.

## PANELISTS



**KEVIN P. CHAVOUS** is a founding board member and executive counsel for the American Federation for Children and the Alliance for School Choice, a noted author, and national education reform leader. As a former member of the Council of the District of Columbia and Chair of the Council's Education Committee, Mr. Chavous was at the forefront of promoting change within the District public school system. His efforts led to more than \$500 million new dollars being made available to educate children in D.C.

A leading national advocate for educational choice, Mr. Chavous helped to shepherd the charter school movement into the nation's capital. Under his education committee chairmanship, the D.C. charter school movement became the most prolific charter school jurisdiction in the country, with now nearly half of D.C.'s public school children attending charter schools. In addition, Mr. Chavous assisted in shaping the District's three-sector education partnership with the federal government. That partnership led to \$60 million in annual federal dollars for D.C.'s public schools, public charter schools, and the first federal scholarship program which has provided access to private schools for nearly 6,000 children from low-income families since inception.

Mr. Chavous, who has a bachelors degree from Wasbash College and a law degree from Howard University School of Law, is also an accomplished author, having published *Serving Our Children: Charter Schools and the Reform of American Public Education*, and his most recent book, *Voices of Determination: Children that Defy the Odds*. Mr. Chavous is involved with many education reform groups and is the Board Chair for Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) and former Board Chair for the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO).



**DOLLY CHUGH** is a professor at New York University's Stern School of Business. She teaches the "Leadership in Organizations" and "Collaboration, Conflict, and Negotiations" courses to MBA students, giving particular attention to issues of social justice and society-enhancing outcomes. Trained as a social psychologist, Ms. Chugh's research focuses on implicit bias, discrimination, and ethics, and has been published in journals such as *Social Justice Research*, *Psychological Science*, *American Economic Review*, *Harvard Business Review*, and the *European Review of Social Psychology*, as well as chapters in edited volumes such as *Diversity at Work and Conflicts of Interest*.

In 2013, Ms. Chugh was nominated by students and selected by an NYU-wide committee to receive the Provost's prestigious 2013 Martin Luther King, Jr. Faculty Award for positive impact within the classroom and in the greater NYU community.

Ms. Chugh has a particular interest in how social science research and management education can contribute to leadership development in the education reform movement. For example, she has worked with the KIPP charter school network since 2006 in facilitating the leadership capabilities of their current and future school leaders, as well as their leaders of school leaders. She has been privileged to work with over 500 KIPP leaders through which she has indirectly touched over 45,000 students. She has advised several independent schools on issues of leadership and diversity as well.

Ms. Chugh received a B.A. from Cornell University where she earned a double major in Psychology and Economics and served as a two-time co-captain of the Varsity Tennis Team (1990), an M.B.A. from the Harvard Business School (1994), and a PhD in Organizational Behavior / Social Psychology from Harvard University (2006).

## PANELISTS



**DOUGLAS COVINGTON** is a parent of two children, a recent high school graduate and a rising high school freshman. Mr. Covington is also a chaplain and member of the Spanish American International Chaplain Association. Additionally, he is also affiliated with Holy Track Outreach Ministries and does ministry work at Christian Cultural Center, both in Brooklyn. Mr. Covington also volunteers as a social worker for the International Center for the Disabled and is a member of the International Christian Brotherhood.

While working with Families Taking Action, a parent subgroup of StudentsFirstNY, Mr. Covington spearheaded the Safe Havens Campaign, where he and other parents encouraged businesses throughout Brooklyn to open their doors to children who felt as if they were in danger while going to or coming home from school. He and his team brought nearly 30 businesses on board to make Brooklyn a safer place for children.



**MARIAMA DIALLO** will be a senior at Brooklyn High School of the Arts in the fall. She's been active with StudentsFirstNY for about a year and has spoken at rallies on the steps of Tweed Courthouse and penned op-eds for newspapers on the importance of teacher quality.

Ms. Diallo has worked since October 2012 as an education intern at Brooklyn Academy of Music, where she assists art teachers with workshops for students six to 18 years old. Her interests are vocal music and public speaking. Ms. Diallo has been singing since she was six and performed at Carnegie Hall with her school.

After high school, Ms. Diallo plans to attend college and study education policy. She would like to work for the New York or the United States Department of Education or a non-profit with a similar mission to StudentsFirstNY.

For four years, Ms. Diallo has been a member of Directions For Our Youth, where she works on community-service projects, such as International Youth Day and does volunteer work to benefit Hurricane Sandy victims. She's also a member of Do You, a Brooklyn-based community service organization, in which she works to expose teens to environments that are outside their comfort zones and have their voices heard.



**NATHALIE ELIVERT** is StudentsFirstNY's Director of Educator Outreach. Prior to joining StudentsFirstNY, taught English Language Arts to eleventh and tenth graders at Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice in downtown Brooklyn and East Side Community High School on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. She led her school's UFT chapter and used her expertise in instruction to directly contribute to a progressive increase in student achievement. As measured by state standardized assessments, her students' passage rate surpassed 90% within the first five years of her teaching. Nathalie's passion to raise student achievement was first sparked by her reaction to an Appellate Court decision in Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. the State of New York. After earning a J.D. from Brooklyn Law School, it was her concern about the decision's impact on the quality of curriculum that led her to become an educator through the Teaching Fellows Program at Pace University. She believes that all students should have access to the kinds of schools where educators (who are also parents) would, themselves, happily choose to enroll their children.

## PANELISTS



**SHIRLEY GOOD FORD** is the National Director of African American Affairs and Community Engagement Officer at Parent Revolution, a non-profit that works directly with parents at underperforming schools in Los Angeles and throughout California to help parents organize to transform their children's under-performing schools using California's historic Parent Trigger law. Ms. Ford, an original member of Parent Revolution, has the distinction of being one of the organization's founding parents.

Ms. Ford has served in a variety of roles. She is a dedicated, outspoken leader on behalf of education reform and empowering parents who, like herself, have strived to educate their children in communities with low-performing public schools. Her leadership on these important issues is recognized throughout California and nationwide.



**GENEVIEVE FOSTER** is the parent of one child who attends Success Academy Charter Schools. After Ms. Foster became a huge proponent of the charter school network, she became a full-time member of the school's external affairs team. In this role, she speaks with parents in the community about new Success Academy Charter schools; how they can apply to the school and get involved once their children are enrolled.

Ms. Foster was on the school's Parent Council for four years – two as vice president and two as president. She worked closely with families to organize events at the school, such as uniform drives for families who could not afford to buy the uniforms; parent and teacher appreciation and fire safety programs and cookouts.

Ms. Foster, who lives in Harlem, has also worked as a volunteer with the REACH Program, where she tutored high school students and worked with the JCC (Jewish Community Center) to provide food for Hurricane Sandy victims.



**HOPE LESANE** began her teaching career at Grand Street Settlement Early Childhood Head Start program, NYC, in September 2001. She taught Pre-K for 3.5 years at Head Start. During this time, Ms. Lesane began to work on creating and expanding a Pre-K to Kindergarten Transition plan in the community she served. In January 2005, she transitioned to becoming a Kindergarten teacher at Manhattan Charter School. She was a founding teacher, and remained in the position for five years.

In September 2010, Ms. Lesane stepped into the full time position of Lead Instructional Coach at Manhattan Charter School. She was responsible for coaching, developing and monitoring rigorous academic experiences for all children, Kindergarten-Grade 5. In July 2012, Ms. Lesane joined staff at Teach For America (TFA) as a Manager, Teacher Leadership Development. In its inaugural year, she coached and mentored 35 corps members, Kindergarten-Grade 12, who were placed in NYC Public Schools. Ms. Lesane is currently coaching and mentoring corps members who are committed to expanding the work of pre-K, with a focus on the borough of Brooklyn. Ms. Lesane is collaborating with other expanded teams at TFA to develop and promote the organization's ECE vision, training and programming across New York City.

Ms. Lesane's passion is for expanding and creating quality school experiences for all children, with a focus on Pre-K. She participated in SUNY Charter School's Institute oversight and school renewal process. Ms. Lesane, along with experts across the state and the Office of Early Learning, worked with State Education Department to create and share Common Core State Standards aligned, Pre-K to Grade 5, model lessons for school districts across the state. She also engaged in a leading role in Pre-K to K Transition summit planning with the Office of Head Start.



**CARRIE E. REMIS** is the founding executive director of the Parent Power Project, a Rochester-based reform organization working to close the achievement gap in New York State by increasing parent engagement and expanding educational opportunities for disadvantaged students.

A self-described “reform convert,” she began her career in education in 1994 as an advocate for New York State’s community college system, representing both the college presidents and boards of trustees. She later served on the administration of the University of Rochester’s Eastman School of Music and the Margaret Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development. In 2007, Ms. Remis joined the administration of the former Nazareth Schools, an independent K-12 Catholic school system with a long tradition of excellence and access in the city of Rochester.

It was as a parent leader in the Rochester City School District that Ms. Remis became concerned about inequities within the public school system and the limited opportunities for meaningful community participation to address these systemic problems. In 2006, she co-founded the Rochester Fund for Educational Accountability, a volunteer organization of professionals providing pro bono advocacy and policy guidance for Rochester’s low-income families encountering barriers to their participation.

In 2012, Governor Cuomo appointed Ms. Remis to the New York State Education Reform Commission. In addition, she serves on the Board of Directors of the Coalition for Opportunity in Education and the New York State Center for Educational Justice. She is a member of the National School Choice Week Coalition and the Rochester-Buffalo Parent Trigger Coalition.

Ms. Remis is a former member of the Democrat and Chronicle’s Board of Contributors and frequent contributor of articles on education reform and parental choice. She has a Bachelor’s degree in History from the University of Albany. She and her husband live in the Greater Rochester Rochester area with their daughter, a high school student.



**CAROLINE ROTH** was born and raised in New York. After graduating from Dartmouth College in 2008, she joined the Teach For America, Los Angeles Corps. She first taught English as a Second Language at Los Angeles High School (from which she was laid off due to its Last-in, First-Out policy), at the same time as she was earning her Masters of Education Degree from Loyola-Marymount University. She then joined the charter network, Inner City Education Foundation, to open its first charter in Inglewood, CA. Ms. Roth stayed at that school for two years teaching Middle School Humanities. She then returned home and began working for the charter network, Achievement First, where Ms. Roth taught 7th grade English at Achievement First Endeavor Middle School in Clinton Hill.

In addition to serving as a grade level chair, Ms. Roth was recognized as a member of the first cohort of Stage 4 “Distinguished Teachers” in Achievement’s First inaugural year of implementing the Teacher Career Pathways System, a comprehensive teacher evaluation system. In May 2013, Ms. Roth left her role in the classroom to become the English Academic Dean at AFE, where she is responsible for holding regular professional development for all English and Social Studies teachers, as well as supporting and developing excellence among the school’s English, Vocabulary and Social Science teachers through weekly observation and coaching.

## PANELISTS



**NATASHA SHANNON** is the parent of three children, two who are school age and attend Success Academy Charter Schools. She co-founded Harlem Parents United, a non-profit that promotes excellence in schools. Through Harlem Parents United, Ms. Shannon works with thousands of parents to educate them on what a quality school and education looks like and what their rights are in getting a quality education for their children. Harlem Parents United supports schools by attending school fairs and other school activities and is open to parents of children attending any type of school – public and private. Ms. Shannon is a member of St. Paul's Community Baptist Church in Brooklyn. She, her husband and children live in Harlem.



**JASMINE VELAZQUEZ** is a natural born advocate. She is special education educator and most recently held the position of Learning Specialist at the Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academy Charter School. While at Promise Academy, Ms. Velazquez worked tirelessly to provide her students with differentiated instruction and support. She worked diligently with her parents to ensure that they understood the special education process and represented her students' best interests at various district meetings. Ms. Velazquez received her Masters of Science in Teaching from Pace University and was a member of the 2008 New York City Teach for America Corps.

While attending Fordham University for her Undergraduate Studies, Ms. Velazquez received her Bachelor's of Arts in Communications and Media Studies. During her tenure at Fordham, she was awarded the W.E.B. Dubois Award for Academic Excellence as well as the Senior Leadership Award for Outstanding Leadership. Ms. Velazquez was also the President of the Black Student Union, Asili, her junior year and organized a group of 12 students to travel to South Africa to study the impact of economic disparity and HIV/AIDS amongst women and children.

Ms. Velazquez spent her first year of teaching at the Ida Posner School, P.S. 165 in Brownsville, Brooklyn. As a member of that community, she witnessed the issues that plagued her students: poverty, broken homes, unreliable transportation, and unequal access to health care. Despite these issues, Ms. Velazquez taught her students to have confidence and self-pride, assuring them that with hard work and discipline they can overcome any obstacle that comes their way.

In 2010 Ms. Velazquez ran for District Leader/State Committeewoman in Brooklyn's 50th Assembly District, which covers Greenpoint, Williamsburg, Fort Greene, and Clinton Hill. She ran against long time incumbent Linda Minucci who at that point served as District Leader for over 26 years. Jasmine ran a tight race garnering over 1200 votes. Although she did not win, Jasmine continues to advocate for people in her community, her students, and her beliefs.

## PANELISTS



**DANIEL WEISBERG** is Executive Vice President of Performance Management and General Counsel for TNTP (formerly The New Teacher Project). Mr. Weisberg serves on the organization's executive team and leads the 100+ staff members in its Performance Management Group towards the goal of providing quality teachers for poor and minority students. TNTP's Performance Management Group supports districts and states across the country designing and implementing improvements in teacher hiring, evaluation, development, compensation and retention and has produced several landmark policy reports including The Widget Effect and The Irreplaceables.

Prior to joining TNTP, Mr. Weisberg served as Chief Executive of Labor Policy and Implementation for the New York City Department of Education. In this role, he led negotiations between the Department and the United Federation of Teachers that resulted in a series of groundbreaking reforms, including the city's highly-regarded "mutual consent" system, which gives teachers and schools the primary voice in school staffing. His distinguished record of policy achievements – including more rigorous tenure standards and principal and teacher bonus programs – has established him as a national leader on improving educational equality. Mr. Weisberg has nearly 20 years of experience in labor and employment law.

Before working for the New York City schools, he was a Partner in the New York office of Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison. Over the past two decades, he has been involved in several different programs mentoring and tutoring inner-city middle and high school students. He holds a J.D. from New York University Law School and a BA in Political Science from Columbia College.



**KEONI WRIGHT** is a supervisor at the New York City Department of Health, where he has worked for 24 years. He is also the parent of five children – two in college, a 6th grader and twins in 1st grade.

Mr. Wright became active in the Safe Havens Campaign through Families Taking Action, a parent subgroup of StudentsFirstNY. He and other parents encouraged businesses throughout Brooklyn to open their doors to children who felt as if they were in danger while going to or coming home from school. The team brought nearly 30 businesses on board to make Brooklyn a safer place for children.

Mr. Wright likes to draw, volunteers with the PTA at PS 158 and is a member of Open Door Baptist Church in Brooklyn. He, his wife, Isha, and their children reside in Brooklyn.



**JOSIAH YOUNG** is a Legislative Analyst for StudentsFirst. Prior to joining StudentsFirst, Josiah studied law at American University. During law school, he spent three semesters teaching constitutional law in the Washington, D.C. Public Schools as part of the Marshall Brennan Program. Josiah has a Bachelors Degree in Business Management from Morehouse College, a J.D. from American University Washington College of Law, and is a member of the New York Bar Association.

A young girl with dark hair, smiling, stands in a parking lot. She is holding a white sign with the text "STUDENTS NEED QUALITY TEACHERS" written in black, hand-drawn capital letters. She is wearing a patterned dress. In the background, there are several cars parked, including a dark Volkswagen Beetle and a white car. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

STUDENTS  
NEED  
QUALITY  
TEACHERS

## MODERATORS



**SARA ALWAN** is a recent graduate of New York University, where she helped lead the NYU Chapter of Students for Education Reform and the NYU College Democrats. After spending the school year as an intern for StudentsFirstNY, she joined the staff full-time in May. Ms. Alwan is continuing her studies part-time at NYU's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service where she is earning an MPA in education policy. She is a Teach for America Rising Leaders Fellow and serves on the Board of the Wagner Education Policy Studies Association.



**CAMPBELL BROWN** is a writer and award-winning journalist who has written for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Daily Beast* and *Slate*, and who has also covered stories around the globe for CNN and NBC News. Through her writing and reporting on education issues, Ms. Brown became a passionate advocate for school choice and education reform. Ms. Brown is the co-founder of the Parents Transparency Project, a non-profit watchdog group on behalf of parents seeking information and accountability from the teachers' unions and Department of Education on actions impacting children in schools. She also serves on the boards of Success Academies, a New York City charter school network and Turnaround, a non-profit addressing the emotional effects of poverty on a child's learning environment. Ms. Brown is also a board member of the Jewish Community Project, a preschool and community center in Lower Manhattan.

Previously, Ms. Brown hosted the primetime nightly news program, "*Campbell Brown for CNN*," and spent 11 years at NBC News where she served as White House Correspondent and primary substitute anchor for Brian Williams on "*NBC Nightly News*." Brown also hosted the Weekend Edition of the "*Today Show*." She lives in New York City with her husband and two sons.

## MODERATORS



**BEN LAZARUS** is the Political Director at StudentsFirstNY. Mr. Lazarus previously worked for the Obama campaign, where he served as Regional Field Director for Jefferson County, Colorado. Prior to that, he was an aide to Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer. He holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Yale University, where he founded one of the original chapters of Students for Barack Obama in 2007.



**RAYSA RODRIGUEZ** is the Director of Advocacy for StudentsFirstNY, where she works to build coalitions with partner organizations and legislators on education reform issues. Ms. Rodriguez previously worked for the United Way of New York City, where she served as Associate Vice President of Education, overseeing United Way's efforts to improve educational outcomes for children and youth in New York City.

Previously, Ms. Rodriguez served as Senior Policy Advisor for Children and Family Services in the Office of the Mayor, where she coordinated the expansion of the Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program, co-led the Mayoral Early Care and Education Policy Steering Committee, and managed the development and implementation of Opportunity NYC, a pilot poverty reduction program.

Ms. Rodriguez earned a Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Studies from Cornell University and a Master of Science in Social Work from Columbia University. She began her career in public service as a New York City public school teacher at P.S. 396 in the Bronx, and then joined the Citizens Committee for Children of New York as a policy associate for child welfare.



**GLEN WEINER** serves as the Deputy Executive Director for StudentsFirstNY. He joined StudentsFirstNY from the Roosevelt Institute, a nonprofit organization devoted to carrying forward the legacy and values of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, where he served as Director of Communications and Interim President and CEO. For seven years prior to his work at the Roosevelt Institute, Mr. Weiner held a number of communications leadership roles at TIAA-CREF, including as Vice President and Head of Business Development Marketing. He has an extensive background in government, politics and communications strategy, serving as Director of Polling and Strategic Planning for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Research Director for Hillary Clinton's 2000 campaign for the United States Senate, and Associate Director of Research in the Clinton White House. Glen earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Classics from Binghamton University. He and his family reside in Brooklyn.

# ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

## ORGANIZATIONS

Each of the following organizations provides a much needed service to our communities. Thank you for participating in StudentsFirstNY's Parent Convention.



New York  
Public  
Library



## SOCIAL MEDIA

The official hashtag for the StudentsFirstNY Parent Conference is **#EducateEmpowerReform**. There are a number of ways you can engage with StudentsFirstNY online at the conference and throughout the year:



[FACEBOOK.COM/STUDENTSFIRSTNY](https://www.facebook.com/STUDENTSFIRSTNY)



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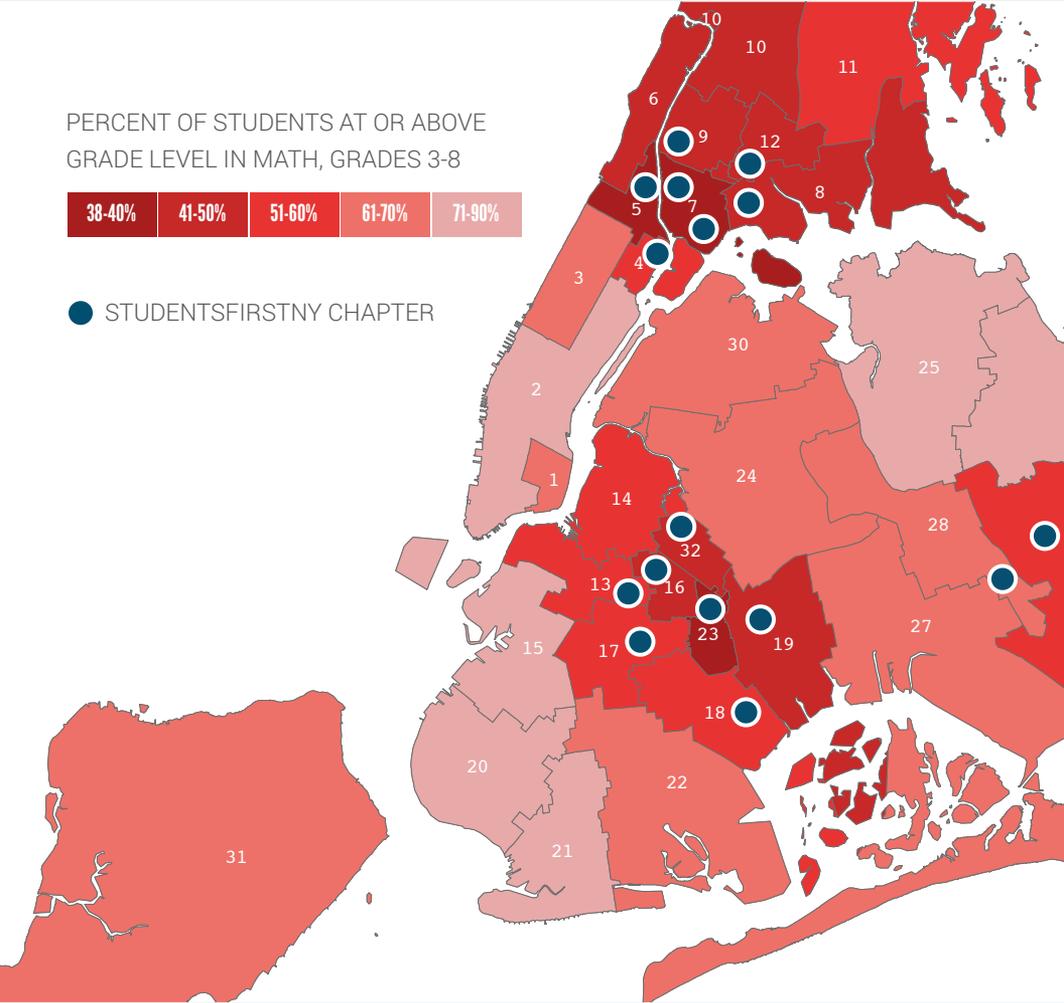
[INSTAGRAM.COM/STUDENTSFIRSTNY](https://www.instagram.com/STUDENTSFIRSTNY)

# STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND PARENT ORGANIZING

PERCENT OF STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE GRADE LEVEL IN MATH, GRADES 3-8



● STUDENTSFIRSTNY CHAPTER



If you'd like to join, parents should e-mail us at [parents@studentsfirstny.org](mailto:parents@studentsfirstny.org).



**“UNTIL WE GET  
EQUALITY IN EDUCATION,  
WE WON’T HAVE AN  
EQUAL SOCIETY.”**

**- SONIA SOTOMAYOR**



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