News12-Brooklyn Reporter Justin Finch talks with Crossroads resident about his dream school and future career plans.

DJJ Kids in Agency-Wide 'Build Your Own School' Competition

Program to engage youth in education attracts media attention

On September 13th and 14th juveniles in detention took part in an agency-wide competition to design their own dream schools.

"The 'Build Your Own School' program was designed to promote school attachment and achievement in a fun and exciting way for residents in the care of the Department of Juvenile Justice," DJJ's Director of Programs Sonia Galarza said in describing the intent of the initiative.

Motivational speakers provided residents at each facility with an inspiring introduction before they returned to their dorms to put on their thinking caps and get down to the challenging task of creating a school from scratch.

Juveniles at DJJ worked dorm by dorm with one another to design all aspects of a modern school, including creation of an educational theme, mission statement, school name, mascot, flag, school song, curriculum, student handbook and school building specifications. The young experts were also tasked with identifying two ideal teacher candidates.

On the second day of the competition, a panel of judges at each facility reviewed all school designs, issuing awards in 16 different categories. Awards covered everything from 'Best Mission' to the 'School Most Likely to Produce a Future President.'

Brooklyn cable news channel News12 visited the Crossroads Juvenile Center, covering the kick-off of their 'Build A School' Program.

Dr. Divine Pryor, Acting Deputy Executive Director of the Center for NuLeadership at Medgar Evers College, gave a powerful motivational speech at Crossroads that strongly resonated with the young residents.

Dr. Pryor reminded the enthusiastic students that they can only succeed by taking action and making positive choices. He also encouraged residents to "Shoot for the moon, because even if you miss it, you'll still be among the stars."

News12's Justin Finch interviewed four Crossroads residents, including two boys and two girls, who discussed their ideas for their dream schools and their plans for life after DJJ.

All of DJJ's residents scored "A's" in the competition for their enthusiasm and creativity in designing their dream schools.

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