

EDUCATION & YOUTH

September 15, 2022

MINUTES

Mr. Hakiem Yahmadi, Chairperson said that the speaker for tonight the presenter will be Ms. Naomi Pena, Co-Founder of the Literacy Academy Collective.

Ms. Naomi Pena, Literacy Academy Collective Co-Founder said thank you all members of CB1 for having me here today. So, I wanted to come to you and present to you what's happening in the South Bronx. One of my opinions is that I don't like when things happen to me without me. I know that there's a lot of things happening, and I think that it's only fair for you as members of the community to know what's going on. So, what I'm going to do is share my screen and walk you through the presentation that I have so then I can explain things to you, and I will take questions afterwards.

So, the name of the non-profit is Literacy Academy Collective with a vision of serving students that have dyslexia but not only dyslexia but other language-based disabilities and who are struggling. The team is a group of mighty moms as I call them, we have a Clinical Psychologist on the team, Instructional Math Coach, Instructional Reading Coach and the rest of us are involved in the community as education space and various spaces. Between us we have ten dyslexic children so, we came together because we saw the deep pain that our children were experiencing in the classroom. If given the proper instruction 95 percent of students could learn to read on grade level.

We also have partners that are going to implement this one of them is Windward Institute they are a special ed school and specialize with students that have dyslexia and language-based disabilities. Another partner of ours is the CUNY School of Education Kate Pace Miles is one of the Dean's of Education and one of the things that we discovered is that you cannot do instruction well if the Teachers don't know how to do the instruction so, she is a partner of ours to reimagine how that looks in the classroom. So, when the Teachers show up to our school, they know exactly how to support our children. Another partner on this project they are a non-profit coming out of Columbia who support families that need it. They are developing a screener but currently what they do is they support whenever they get a referral, they support the student they show them to read they get them evaluated, give them a house psychological

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free of charge and then they support them throughout the process if they need a different classroom setting and supports.

So, why are we here, the reason we thought of this is because we firmly believe that reading is the most significant civil rights issue in New York City. We know that reading is the most basic fundamental that we need and because of that you will see the consequences of those who do not reach that potential. This is our current reading scores, I'm not a fan of standardized testing but Hispanics, Blacks, those with disabilities and English language learners are not passing the test and you cannot tell me that those students are not capable of passing an ELA exam.

If you are a student that has struggled to read you quickly start to realize as it happened with my own children that you don't do well at school, and once you don't do well in school you start to disengage. Several years ago, there was an independent study done of those who were incarcerated in Rikers, and they found that of those who were 19 to 21 60 to 80 percent of them had a reading and writing disability undiagnosed.

So, with dyslexia is a specific disability that's neurobiological meaning that it is a condition of the brain. It doesn't mean that they're incapable it just means that the portion of their brain that they need to use the decoding you know sounding out the words, blending the words together, the comprehension is not functioning as it should. It does not mean it's not capable of functioning as it should and because of that we have discovered that there is a high number of people who are not diagnosed with this. It is an incredibly expensive way to diagnose you have to have a neuropsychological it can run you anywhere from \$5 to \$10 thousand dollars and there's some estimations that its anywhere between one and five Americans have dyslexia.

So, this is a basic view of reading and I think a lot of people don't understand how reading happens and this is the basic formula you need to be able to decode the word so, look at the letters sound them out, you need to know what the word means and that would make you a proficient reader. If you lack the decoding or the language comprehension you are not functioning as a functioning literate, you are considered illiterate. I show this slide only because I think folks forget how deeply complicated to do English. I for one English is not my native tongue and I remember learning English and it was very difficult it was not something that was easy, and I've learned other languages in my schooling, and I found even in other languages just figuring out what words meant and spelling them was much easier in that language versus in English. So, there's two key components to language it's called language comprehension the vocabulary, the reasoning and then the word recognition which is the decoding the blending and that stuff once you start recognizing and learning the fundamentals and you have the skills that you need you become a skilled reader.

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So, right now the approach that we do in this country is called balanced literacy. Balance literacy is the approach that we do currently so for those who have children or grandchildren in the system, you have seen your child or grandchild come home with sight words, so these are words on a piece of paper or on note cards where they're asked for to memorize at no point and time are they telling the child take each word and start blending them together. It's basic repetition. Also, when a child is early in a stage of learning how to read there's a lot of walking through the pages as they call it you look at a picture and try to figure out what's happening in the picture and what we've discovered is throughout the beginning of the years you're supposed to learn to read and then after second or third grade you need to read to learn. So, if you don't have the fundamentals of being able to read the rest of your educational career is going to be a challenge. We are advocating for something called structured literacy clearly based in science and it is the approach of learning phonics, comprehension at a very repetitive way so, no child is ever left in the classroom not knowing the context. No one is left behind everyone moves together and the approach is very similar to the way they do it in these private institutions. They assess the child they figure out what levels there in and they put them in a classroom with other students who are around the same level, and they all work together on the same skills and move along. So, the stigma that's normally attached is removed and the child doesn't feel dumb or in my son's case he used to tell me that he had a small brain, and they're empowered with the information that they need to be successful.

So, this is another slide that I like to show there's different tiers of reader structured literacy has been proven to support 95 percent of the students, so every single child can benefit. This chart on the left shows that there is a wide ranging of readers who just get it, it's organic it just clicks quickly, but for the vast majority of readers it is not that easy. Well over 50 percent of the students need explicit instruction and support. So, what we would like to do is support the students that are in the orange and the red to bring them up to levels that are in the green.

One thing that we also want to elevate is that all of this work will be grounded in culturally responsive and sustaining education and one of the first pillars in order to even have that culturally responsive and sustaining education the student must experience academics success and that is going to be incredibly hard if the child is struggling academically. You could all the amazing literature in front of them about amazing leaders and instructors but if they cannot read the text, they're never going to be able to experience seeing themselves in other people will feel like.

So, what are we doing we are a non-for-profit, and our vision is three pronged the first we would love to open five schools in total so, it would be one per borough. Hopefully fingers crossed we're still in communication with DOE, but we hope to open the first one in the South Bronx and then other schools will follow later. Two other approaches are working with CUNY

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and the Windward School to train Teachers. Like I said before the key component to this is Teacher training. We have discovered and Teachers have shared that they do not know anything about the science of reading, they have never been taught how to teach children how to read. So, there is a significant amount of professional development that we will expose Teachers to this is not a DOE 8-hour class, this is an at least a year commitment that's going to happen throughout the time there with us. We also want to create a partnership with district schools, so for those schools that are not LAC schools, and we are constantly getting asked from other districts we want you in our community what can we do. So, what we want to do is open up ways that we can support those districts. For instance, we have a small pilot of two classrooms 2nd and 3rd grade in PS161 the Principal has even offered he wants to do the training as well and we're training 6 of the Teachers there and the vision is once we open up our school the Teachers will stay behind, and they will continue to do the work. He wants to implement this throughout his school and he's going to continue to train his Teachers through us. So, this is our pilot that we currently have instead of two 2nd grades we changed it to a 2nd and 3rd grade so we can reach more students. What we started to do actually here we trained 6 Teachers over the summer so what they did they worked at PS5 during the summer rising site and we got 30 kids and that site we divided into 3 classrooms we had 2 Teachers per classroom plus we had a Windward Teacher and a mentor work with all our Teachers along the way. So, while they were learning on their own time doing professional development, they were also using what they learned in the classroom with someone that could support them in the work. So, it was a beautiful way to collaborate and the Teachers both from Windward and also from our DOE Teachers loved the experience and they are continuing that process now in the Fall. So, while we won't have full instruction all-day we're going to have at least 3 yearly blocks that's going to help with their reading, writing and the decoding piece.

We do not have the admission screening just yet this is something that we're working with DOE on we are just starting conversations. So, our vision is once we open up in the near future with at least 4 Teachers that are trained so we can open up 4 classrooms. Ideally if we are at 161 we will open up at 161 until we can find a home. I want to end this because I think it's super important, I don't think I have to elevate it here but a lot of people have asked a lot of questions around this work and what it means and the fear of what we're doing to our children we're isolating them were marginalizing them and I just want to elevate that there's nothing progressive about having any child not knowing how to read. If I can tell you with absolute heartbreak how challenging it is and how many tears, I've shed seeing the true pain that my children have been in during their academic career, and I would never want that for any other child. I say this all the time I wish this school was around to help my kids and believe me my 12-year-old would love to come to this school. I just know how amazing of an impact this is going to have on hundreds of thousands of kids to come. So, with that I will take questions.

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Mr. Hakiem Yahmadi, Chairperson asked are there any questions.

Questions and Answers

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