

Cause 4: Improve academic opportunities for economically disadvantaged, but not special-needs, K-12 children in New York City

I. List of programs

Since its founding in 1998, Replications, Inc. has been striving to offer superior educational opportunities to public school children who would otherwise be educated in poorly performing schools. We have fulfilled this mission by creating, one after another, small, excellent schools. During our first year we established ourselves as an organization, selected model schools to replicate and developed a replication process. Over the past nine years, we have implemented and refined this process twenty-six times creating twenty-four new schools in New York City and two Innovation High Schools in Baltimore.

Because our original method of school replication links outstanding models to a dependable method for reproducing success, the work of Replications, Inc. has enormous potential to improve educational opportunities for New York City's children. In selecting schools for replication, our conviction is that the deficits students typically bring to a poorly performing public school – poor academic preparation, counter-productive peer influence, violence encountered in the streets – must be confronted by an equally intense counter-force on school grounds. However, we do not approach our work with a narrow preconception of what form this counter-force must take. The models that we have selected for replication range in pedagogical method, academic curriculum, and teaching philosophy. Since our founding, Replications, Inc. has identified eight exceptional schools to serve as models for replication – the Frederick Douglass Academy, the Mott Hall School, the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP Academy), International High School, Central Park East Secondary School, the Noble Street Charter High School in Chicago, the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics and the Boston Latin School. From these models, we have worked with five regional superintendents and the Department of Education's Office of New Schools to create twenty-four new public schools – twelve middle schools, four secondary schools and eight high schools. These “replicated schools,” without exception, are performing at the top of their respective districts (see enclosed “Replications, Inc. Program Impacts: Analysis of Results, Prepared by Arete Consulting” (December 2006)).

In January the Department of Education issued a request for proposals for education nonprofits to apply to become Partnership Support Organizations (PSO). This is a bold strategy to test non-traditional approaches to school support and to give principals and school leadership teams more latitude in selecting coaching, mentoring and professional development support specifically tailored to their needs. In May principals chose their support providers from one of three sources: from one of four Learning Support Centers (similar to the existing regions); by joining the Empowerment Zone (where member schools are formed into networks and select their network director); or by choosing to receive support from an external partner—a PSO. Being strong supporters of Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein's efforts to transform New York's school system and its schools, we felt we had no choice but to apply to become a PSO. In April we were approved and in July Replications PSO became the Partnership Support Organization for nine New York City Public Schools; six Replications, Inc. schools and three schools that were unknown to us prior to the selection process.

Replications, Inc. has just submitted a proposal to the New York City Department of Education's Office of Portfolio Development to open a new middle school, Mott Hall Prep, in Bushwick in September 2008. The Office of Portfolio Development, formally the Office of New Schools, is the department which approves and supports the development of new schools. If granted, monies from the Clear Fund will be used to support the one-year planning process which will take place prior to opening the new school (see attached Mott Hall Prep planning year budget).

II. Population served by Mott Hall Prep

Although Mott Hall Prep will bill itself as a preparatory middle school designed to prepare students for admission into New York City’s selective high schools, its student population will not be selected based on reading or math scores. The only criterion used to “screen” incoming sixth grade students is will be “informed choice,” where students and their families select their school based on interest. And, preference will be given to students who live in Bushwick, where the school will be located. Mott Hall Prep will share space with P.S. 147 and the Brooklyn Latin School. The population of P.S. 147, a neighborhood school, is 99% minority (57% Hispanic and 42% African-American). P.S. 147 is designated a “Category 9 School” which means the Department of Education considers it a high needs school. More than half of the students are reading below grade level (8.5% testing at level 1, 40.1% testing at level 2). Just over 40% are reading at or about grand level (level 3) and less than 10% are reading above grade level (level 4). 6.3% of the P.S. 147 students are special-needs (least restricted) and 12% are special-needs students (most restricted). Slightly over 9% of the student population is classified as English Language Learners (ELL). 85% of the students at P.S. 147 are eligible for free lunch. With the possible exception of a most restricted special-needs cohort, we anticipate that the student demographic of Mott Hall Prep will be virtually identical to the student demographic of P.S. 147. Therefore, whatever success Mott Hall Prep achieves in getting its graduating classes into New York City’s premium high schools will be based on the school’s ability to take a representative group of inner-city kids and educate them to levels commensurate with their more privileged middle class peers.

III. Program Activities

On August 3, 2007 Erin McMahon Balet, the designated leader of Mott Hall Prep, will defend a proposal (see attached) that was recently submitted to the Department of Education’s Office of Portfolio Development. She will be joined by members of a planning team which includes experts in school replication and startup, four principals, teachers from the Brooklyn Latin School, and parents and students from the Bushwick community. We have every expectation that the proposal will be approved, triggering the year-long planning process that will result in the new middle school opening in P.S. 147 in Bushwick in September 2008.

As noted above, Replications, Inc. has launched twenty-four New York City public schools and will open two more in September 2007 (KAPPA VII Middle School in Brooklyn and KAPPA International High School in the Bronx). To date we have created five Mott Hall middle schools and two Mott Hall high schools. All of our Mott Hall schools are based on the Mott Hall School, a selective middle school in Washington Heights. With one exception, the replicated Mott Hall middle schools are not selective; they accept whoever applies. The two Mott Hall high schools are “unscreened” which means they must follow the Department of Education’s high school articulation guidelines which severely limit their ability to hand pick their students.

The process we will use to replicate Mott Hall Prep will be the same process we used with all of our Mott Hall schools – with one exception; we will not place the future leader in one of the Mott Hall schools for a year-long residency to learn the Mott Hall model. Erin McMahon Balet, the designated leader of Mott Hall Prep, is currently the assistant principal in charge of the Pace Academy, a middle school academy at I.S. 118 in the Bronx. The Pace Academy is based on the Mott Hall model. When Erin trained at New Leaders for New Schools, her mentoring principal was Dr. Mirian Acosta Sing. Dr. Sing was the principal at the original Mott Hall School for twelve years. Hence Erin is fully conversant with the Mott Hall model.

Erin will begin meeting weekly with a Replications, Inc. Project Director in late August or early September. At these meetings, the project director and Erin will work on a curriculum overview, staff recruiting, site readiness, budgeting, selecting and ordering instructional supplies, and developing an action plan for implementing the Mott Hall essential features—those salient characteristics which are responsible for the original school’s uniqueness and high quality. Erin will participate in a Replications Inc. leadership retreat in October with nine other Replications principals. A school planning retreat will be held in April once all of the school’s staff has been selected. The goal of the school planning retreat will be to enable each staff person to begin to internalize the Mott Hall model and to plan for a summer student orientation and the opening of the school in September 2008.

Replications, Inc. provides extensive professional development support to the school leaders and staffs in our Partnership Support Network. As a member of our network, Mott Hall Prep will participate in activities designed to strengthen leadership and improve teaching. Erin will benefit from membership in the Principals Council, which in addition to planning network activities and setting network policy, functions as a critical friends group (a learning community) for principals. Teachers at Mott Hall Prep will be formed into a teachers’ critical friends group, which will be facilitated by a Replications, Inc. staff member. As a part of the critical friends process, which includes critiquing one another’s lessons, teachers will identify their priority areas for professional development and Replications, Inc. will provide training to meet these needs. Replications, Inc.’s senior staff and senior consultants as well as independent consultants and advisors will provide expertise in the following areas: curriculum mapping and design, pedagogy, developing teaching strategies for special-needs and ELL students, school organization, and budgeting.

IV. Evaluation

Internal Assessments: We assess our work internally by: (1) our success in meeting commitments to launch new schools and to sustain existing replications; and (2) the success of the schools we create in providing excellent educational opportunities to their students. We measure the first criteria by a quarterly review of milestones set forth in our written annual plan. We will measure the second by a semi-annual review of such records as standardized test scores; student attendance rates; teacher retention rates; student graduation rates; and each school’s adherence to the benchmarks of its Essential Features Action Plan (which is monitored monthly with scores for each benchmark posted on our website).

External Assessments: We rely on two sources for external assessments; assessments we commission (see attached Arete Analysis) and the steadily improving assessments generated by the Department of Education which include school quality reviews and school report cards. These are available on the Department’s website. The Department has signaled its clear intention to use academic performance measures to identify failing schools and where there is no improvement over a two year period, reassign and in some cases remove the principal. As a Partnership Support Organization we are highly motivated to make sure that the schools in our network (which will include Mott Hall Prep) demonstrate yearly increases as measured by standardized tests and regents pass rates, raise average attendance to 95% or better and graduate students prepared to excel in high school and in college. By our definition, in a truly successful school virtually all students will achieve their full academic potential, thus building a foundation from which to pursue their dreams.