

THE PROMISE



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COMUNIDAD PROMESA DE LA MISION
NEIGHBORHOOD



Student Ah'layah and her mentor Anttwan

MENTORING AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS AT JAMES LICK MIDDLE SCHOOL

An African American child in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) is more likely to get suspended than to be academically proficient. This is not only an SFUSD issue: This is also the reality impacting James Lick Middle School (JLMS). At JLMS, this year we have 475 students enrolled; of those enrollees, about 6% are African American, which is a number that continues to decline. In the 2018-19 school year, one-third of all African American students were chronically absent and only 3% of African American students were meeting or exceeding mathematics standards, while 7% were meeting ELA standards. While these statistics show one side of the story, it is a reality that for our African American students there are systemic issues at play that make school a less than conducive space for learning. This creates a disconnect for many of our African American students and families when navigating the education system.

Historically, systemic barriers include students; rising housing costs, environmental injustices, high rates of poverty, long commutes to school and disproportionate rates of discipline. Schools that serve the African American community are under resourced and understaffed. Students do not see themselves represented in the staff makeup, which can lead to mistrust between parents and schools. These barriers combine to contribute to lower graduation rates for African American students. All of these factors led SFUSD to create the PITCH Plan to close the opportunity and achievement gap. This PITCH Plan incorporates the following: Professional Capacity, Instructional Guidance, Transformative Mindsets, Collaborative Culture and High-Quality Staff.

This year at JLMS, one result of the PITCH Plan is that we have created the African American Student Success Team (AASST). This team is designed to help reverse these trends and to collectively develop a Theory of Action to identify schoolwide strategies to interrupt this unfortunate reality. The team comprises teachers, administrators, Restorative Practice Instructional Coach, Family Success Coach, paraeducators, security guards, and school partners such as Jamestown. Together, they work to serve as mentors for all African American students at this school.

The main priority of the mentorship program is to support the academic and social-emotional growth and development of students on our campus. They jointly discuss college, career readiness, and ways to engage in the community to prepare and encourage students to have a successful future. This plan is also developed in collaboration with teachers and parents. For example, mentors participated in Student-Led Conferences by supporting the students as they presented their work portfolios to their parents and teachers. Students took pride and ownership in having their families and mentors participate in their presentation.

Ah'layah, a 6th-grader participates in the program and is mentored by Jamestown Beacon Director Anttwan. She checks in with him every day -- and he supports her. Ah'layah had a D in P.E.; however, after Anttwan spoke to her and explained the importance of not talking when the teacher is and offered other ways to raise her grade, Ah'layah was able to earn a C. Her favorite class is music, and she is learning to play the clarinet. She is also a part of the Jamestown After-School Program, where she manages the flag football team.

While academics, college and career make up one piece of the mentorship program, at the center lies genuine relationship-building and creating an inclusive, positive and welcoming environment for all students and their families. Mentors have also done pizza parties and lunch outings with their mentees. Anttwan and Ah'layah have gone to Starbucks together, which is where Ah'layah one day hopes to work. Overall, Anttwan has noticed that his mentee's behavior has improved. He has also developed a relationship with her mom, who feels comfortable calling and checking in with him. They work together to ensure the student stays on top of her academics. Overall, Ah'layah says the mentorship is fun -- and the bond between mentor and mentee is highly evident. AASST has had a positive impact and was well received by the students.



Roxana and her son, Giovanni

SHARPENING MY SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

The Mission Language and Vocational School (MLVS) Culinary Program is a job-training program that prepares future cooks by exploring diverse cultural menus and recipes, as well as familiarizing them with culinary terminology and technical vocabulary used in the hospitality and food-service industries.

Roxana, a former Sanchez Elementary School parent, exhibits a passion for cooking and dreams of one day opening her own restaurant. Roxana graduated last July from MLVS's 24-week Culinary Program.

Upon completion of the program, Pedro asked Roxana to tell us about her experience in the job-training program:

How did you learn about the cooking program?

I learned about the program through Mission Promise Neighborhood, specifically from Pedro, who is based at Sanchez Elementary School. Pedro told me the details about the program and I became interested. I had to apply.

How challenging was it to complete the program?

Whenever you are interested in something, you must fight until you reach that goal. In my case, that was challenging because I also work and needed to be at my job. On the other hand, it was not very difficult either because my motivation is my family – and the desire to learn something new and different for my benefit.

How did you deal with the fact that the program is in English?

Well, I understand a little English, but what really matters is the desire of the person to learn. Today they have two groups: one in English and one in Spanish. I recommend this cooking program to all parents and community members who have time, but, above all who want to get ahead.

Has the program helped you conquer challenges?

Of course! The program has helped me in many aspects, especially in my work as a cook. I am proud to have graduated and overcome the barrier. No matter the challenges we have in life, if we have goals we should not rest until we achieve them.



THE PROMISE COMMITTEE

From left: Alejandro, Ana, Pedro, Mariana, Liz, Dannhae, and Flor. Our mission is to share accomplishments and stories by students, families and partner organizations that are part of our network. The Promise Newsletter will be published quarterly, so the next one will be on April, 2020. If you have an idea or would like to share your story, contact Alejandro at (415) 282-3334 ext. 126 or abautista@medasf.org.