



April 2009

# Core Team



**At the Core of Our Mission  
Are Children**



**The School District  
of Philadelphia Core Beliefs**

Children come first.

Parents are our partners.

Victory is in the classroom and facilitated  
by a strong instructional leader.

Leadership and accountability  
are the keys to success.

It takes the engagement of the  
entire community to ensure the success  
of its public schools.



**Do you know this person?  
See page 7.**

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“I am not bound to win but I am  
bound to be true; I am not bound  
to succeed but am bound to live  
up to what light I have.”

Abraham Lincoln

## At the Core

With

Superintendent Arlene C. Ackerman

## Building a Culture of Accountability

**A**fter reading President Barack Obama’s education plan a few weeks ago, I thought a long time about several points he made, especially the point about responsibility. “I want to lead a new era of mutual responsibility in education,” he said, “one where we all come together for the sake of our children’s success; an era where each of us does our part to make that success a reality—parents and teachers, leaders in Washington, and citizens all across America....” Now that the School Reform Commission has given us a “green light” to implement *Imagine 2014*, our strategic plan, I feel a special kinship with the President’s agenda and invite you—the entire School District of Philadelphia family—to come together in solidarity as we move forward to accelerate student success and to realize every opportunity we imagined possible for ALL our children. We are answerable and thus accountable for “doing our part to make success a reality” for all students in equal measure.



Both the President and our plan challenge us to take a collective stand on our promise to deliver a solid and basic education for ALL Philadelphia students. “**Accountability for all adults,**” a key priority in *Imagine 2014*, serves a dual purpose. First, it is a declaration that expresses our willingness to take responsibility and, second, to participate in a performance management system that will provide a mechanism whereby we—as educators and employees of the School District of Philadelphia—can show SDP families, partners, and the public the progress we are making in doing our part so that ALL students will have opportunities to achieve and succeed.

For as long as I can remember, we have held the children responsible for learning what we teach and demonstrating what they have learned. Now it is our turn. To believe in our mission as public school educators means believing that we are accountable for student outcomes. Furthermore, if we know and understand that beliefs drive our actions

*continued on page 3*

# ***SRC adopts Imagine 2014***

## **Vote wraps up latest phase of public engagement campaign to communicate and gather input for five-year strategic plan**

**T**he School District of Philadelphia's *Imagine 2014* team has wrapped up a far-reaching public engagement campaign that successfully communicated with and gathered input from more than 3,000 Philadelphians throughout the city.

With seven regional community meetings, two regional student information sessions, and numerous listening sessions involving a wide array of organizations, the District engaged students, parents, teachers, principals and other District staff, government officials, community members and education advocates in a very detailed and focused conversation on every aspect of the draft version of the five-year plan.

During these meetings and listening sessions, members of the District's leadership team facilitated and solicited input from all participants. The comments and suggestions from the

participants were collected and posted on the District's web site for review. These notes can be accessed at [www.philasd.org/strategicplan](http://www.philasd.org/strategicplan).

The District made the final version of the five-year strategic plan available to the public by posting it on the District's web site on April 10. This new version benefitted from the many recent hours of public comment and testimony collected throughout Philadelphia. To give those who participated in the process an opportunity to see how public feedback informed the version of *Imagine 2014* that was presented to the School Reform Commission (SRC), two informational sessions were held in the community on April 20.

The *Imagine 2014* strategic plan was officially presented to the SRC during its planning meeting on April 15. The SRC unanimously approved the strategic plan at its voting meeting on April 22.



**Thomas E. Darden Jr.**

### **New chief of staff brings wealth of experience**

Thomas E. Darden Jr., a former investment manager with a passion for public service, has joined the District's Core Team as the new Chief of Staff. Darden has 30 years of experience in a range of management roles in venture capital as well as at both startups and Fortune 100 companies. In 2000, he co-founded Reliant Equity Investors, a management-centric private equity investment firm, and acquired and oversaw seven businesses that totaled \$395 million in revenue. Currently, Darden is participating as a Fellow in The Broad Superintendents Academy, which encourages and prepares prominent executives to assume leadership roles in the field of urban education.

**Core Team** is distributed monthly to employees of The School District of Philadelphia. Please send comments or questions to [coreteam@philasd.org](mailto:coreteam@philasd.org)

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**Go to**  
**[www.philasd.org/strategicplan](http://www.philasd.org/strategicplan)**  
**to view the plan and**  
**comments and suggestions from**  
**planning process participants**

# Core Team Adopters' Corner

*Editor's Note: In September, as part of the Superintendent's Core Team initiative, central office managers were each paired with a school and charged with establishing viable and meaningful relationships as "adopters" of their schools. This recurring newsletter feature will highlight some of the results of these relationships.*

**Anton Hackett** of Capital Programs convinced one of the District's environmental contractors to also adopt "his" school – **Benjamin Franklin Elementary School**. This resulted in the donation of a 55-gallon fish tank, with all the trimmings, by Kleinfelder. This month, students will assist in creating an underwater-themed mural in the hallway where the fish tank will be housed. The total value of the gift is an estimated \$5,000.

**Frank Tagye** of Risk Management is helping the Philadelphia Business and Technology High School track a

number of pending facilities requests that focus on the school gym and its fittings.

**Barbara Farley** of Communications worked with **George Washington Elementary School** Principal Margaret Mullen Bavwidinsi to come up with the idea of a "Mini-March for Babies" to benefit the March of Dimes. The principal and staff then took the concept and "ran with it," carrying out a whole-school walk through the community, raising \$400, and creating a model for other schools to emulate. (Please see the related article on page

4.) The "Mini-March" was covered by Channel 6 and a community newspaper.

**Dawn Renee Chism** and **J.H. Brown Elementary School** have established a mutually-appreciative relationship. Chism delivered winter holiday candy canes for the students and staff and that kicked off a chain reaction. Ms. Gilmer's fifth-grade students provided hand-made "thank you" cards to their adopter, and she later gave the class character traits posters which the teacher is using to relate attributes of characters in stories the children are reading to the ones listed on the posters. The gift of posters elicited a hand-made spring scene and 27 original "Happy Spring" cards signed by the students. The principal and staff also sent Chism a Valentine's Day card and flowers.

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## Dr. Ackerman's Message

*continued from page one*

and decisions, then acting accountable will surely follow. It won't happen by simply saying it, writing it or even agreeing to it. We need to believe. Then, we will understand and accept the reality that when a child fails, it's not the child's fault. Rather, every child's failure is a warning that signals a broken system. Thus, it follows that systems break and fail when adults stop caring and paying attention. My dear colleagues, we are the system. The system works when we work—that's our job. The future of our children depend on us getting it right, on us working together and on us holding ourselves accountable for student outcomes in life and learning.

**"Accountability for all adults"** is not limited to meeting federal (AYP) or state (PSSA) performance expectations. Clearly, standardized national and state tests are important diagnostic tools for teaching and learning; however, a bigger picture of progress tells a better, more accurate story of success in all classrooms, schools and

departments. This is why we have tied performance measurements and goals to system-wide evaluations. Implemented with equity and good judgment, measurements can show our progress towards goals just as School Report Cards show degrees of improvement. Annual progress reports can motivate and energize schools and staff to keep striving to do better as well as hold us accountable to the public whom we serve.

With common standards of professionalism and a system of strategic consequences and rewards for high performance, we can grow excellence, put an end to mediocrity, and eradicate failing behaviors. For us and for the future of our children, failure is not an option. No way. No how.

Everyday news of our declining economy is packed with lessons about accountability. Chief among them is this: when the reputations of individuals and organizations are on the line, truth is revealed. When that happens, wrongs can be righted and order can

be restored. For us and the children, this lesson translates into the hope that a basic education can and should provide to ALL students.

Before closing, I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to everyone who contributed time, energy and their best thinking to shaping our strategic plan for the next five years. Thank you.

Respectfully,



Arlene C. Ackerman, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
The School District of Philadelphia

# Governor and Mayor appoint School Reform Commission members

The leadership of the School Reform Commission has a new look. On March 28, Governor Edward G. Rendell appointed attorney Joseph Dworetzky to the School Reform Commission and Mayor Michael A. Nutter named attorney Robert L. Archie and educator Johnny Irizarry to the panel. In addition, Governor Rendell designated Archie as the new SRC chairman and reappointed sitting Commissioner Heidi A. Ramirez to a new term on the SRC.



## New Face of School Reform Commission (SRC)

Superintendent Arlene Ackerman (front row, left) pauses with members of the SRC following the March 28 ceremony during which Governor Rendell and Mayor Nutter announced a total of four appointments to the District's governance body. The SRC as it is now constituted includes Chairman Robert L. Archie Jr., Esq. (second from left), Commissioners Denise McGregor Armbrister (third from left), Heidi A. Ramirez, Ph.D. (second from right) and Johnny Irizarry (far right). Awaiting State Senate confirmation as a gubernatorial appointee is Joseph A. Dworetzky (third from left).

## New SRC members lend expertise to governance body

Archie is a partner at Duane Morris, L.L.P. He concentrates his practice in the areas of municipal finance, real estate and corporate law for non-profit corporations. Irizarry is director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Hispanic Excellence: La Casa Latina. He is a former School District of Philadelphia program specialist, charter school educator and executive director of cultural and multi-service organizations in North Philadelphia. Dworetzky is a partner at Hangley Aronchick Segal & Pudlin, where he represents business and government clients.

Archie and Irizarry officially joined Commissioners Denise McGregor Armbrister and Heidi A. Ramirez, Ph.D. on the SRC when they took the oath of office, administered by Mayor Nutter, in an April 8 ceremony.

## Governor's appointments require Senate confirmation

Dworetzky will fill the remaining seat on the five-member commission. His gubernatorial appointment, as well as the reappointment of Commissioner Ramirez to a new term, awaits confirmation by the Pennsylvania Senate.



*April 26 regional March for Babies was resounding success*

## Led by Superintendent, District staff, students and parents stepped out on 5-mile fundraising walk

The April 26 regional March of Dimes March for Babies was the culmination of months of School District activities focusing on this worthwhile cause.

Stepping out in the bright sunshine from the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Superintendent Arlene Ackerman put the exclamation point on her service as the march's honorary youth chair. Following behind the Superintendent were approximately 350 District staff, students and parents, as well as thousands of adults and children from throughout the region.

So far, the District raised more than \$30,000. Contributions from schools and offices may still be turned in. For more information about contribution drop-offs, call the Office of Strategic Partnerships, 215-400-5583.

◀ **Ready to step out** — Superintendent Ackerman addresses the crowd and thanks the participants for their support prior to the start of the five-mile walk on Martin Luther King Drive.

# Seeds of Success

## Student Re-Engagement Center surpasses expectations

**A**fter only eight months in operation—from May 2008 to January 2009—the School District's new Re-Engagement Center assisted 1,662 youth and adults in the process of re-connecting to school. The center's small staff of four full-time employees and four college interns went far beyond the first-year goal of serving 1,200 out-of-school youth.

"This is a sign of tremendous success that surpassed all our expectations," said Majeedah Scott, assistant director of Multiple Pathways to Graduation.

The Re-Engagement Center was created to provide young people and their families with a comprehensive "one-stop shop" for information and placement services for youth interested in re-enrolling in a high school diploma or GED program.

"The center works with young people between the ages of 16 and 21 who are disconnected from school," Scott said. "They receive referrals to an education program that best fits their needs and allows them to earn a high

school diploma. During the re-enrollment process, staff monitor the clients' progress in the education program and provide support and resources as needed."

The top four reasons individuals identified as why they left school were:

- Childcare/pregnancy,
- Family issues,
- Didn't like their assigned school, and
- Behavioral issues.

The majority of the center's customers were female—58.2%,—compared to males, who accounted for 41.8%. Racially and ethnically, the participants identified themselves as: 71.6% African-American, 15.9% Other, 8.8% Hispanic, 1.9% Caucasian, 0.9% Asian and 0.4% Multi-Cultural. The remaining 0.5% did not provide this information.

Re-Engagement Center's clients took advantage of a broad range of possible social services referrals. This was made possible through a close partnership between the center and the Mayor's Office as well as the City of Philadelphia Departments of Human Services

and Behavioral Health, and the Philadelphia Youth Network. Participants identified their social services needs as employment, housing, childcare, parenting services, mental health, counseling, and drug and alcohol counseling.

The center credits their early success to the partnership they developed with a number of social services agencies, and education and child advocate organizations. Another contributing factor was the outreach conducted by center personnel to schools, and to parent and community organizations throughout the city.

Young people can access referral services over the telephone via the Re-engagement Center Hotline, 215-400-6700. Appointments for center-based referral services can be set up over the telephone or in person weekdays from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Walk-in referral services are available Monday through Friday during the same hours. The center is located at 440 North Broad Street, Suite 1013 (first floor).



*Great entertainment with no admission charge!*

## Spring festivals showcase student talents in choral and instrumental music

**D**o you love fantastic live music and song, but are feeling the pinch in your entertainment budget?

The younger set will take the stage at the Merriam Theater, 250 S. Broad Street, at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, May 13 for all All-Philadelphia Middle School Music Festival.

Earlier this spring, the District's young jazz masters performed in the

All-City Jazz Fest held at the Arts Academy at Rush. In addition, the Kimmel Center was the venue for the All-Philadelphia High School Music Festival.

For more information or to obtain tickets for the All-Philadelphia Middle School Festival, please call Virginia Lam at 215-400-5974 or e-mail her at [vlam@philasd.org](mailto:vlam@philasd.org).

### How to submit items for a future "Honor Roll" column

Since *Core Team* is a publication for School District of Philadelphia employees, "Honor Roll" is a regular feature to spread the word about local, state and national honors our employees have received, and honors which their work has made possible for their schools or administrative offices. Please send items that fit this description to [coreteam@philasd.org](mailto:coreteam@philasd.org). You may also submit photos and captions to accompany "Honor Roll" items.

Alternatively, if your school or office is seeking publicity for a **future** event or activity which you feel has news value for the general public, please submit a publicity request form to the Office of Communications. You may find this form online through the District's web site, [www.philasd.org](http://www.philasd.org). Go to "Sitemap," "Communications," "Forms," then "Publicity Request Form." Clicking on "save" at the end of the completed form will send your information by e-mail to the Office of Communications.

## Honor Roll

**Furness High School** is celebrating the fact that senior **Tazhe Cooper** received The President's Call to Service Award in recognition and appreciation of his commitment to strengthening our nation and for making a difference through volunteer service. Tazhe's cause is promoting organ donations. This straight "A" student is headed to West Chester University.

Overbrook High School teacher **Bonnee Breese** was one of 12 teachers from around the nation selected by the American Federation of Teachers to be in the audience for President Obama's on-line town hall meeting held on March 26. She had the opportunity to ask a question of the President and even elicited a presidential shout-out to Overbrook.

**Dwayne E. Frazier** of Randolph Technical High School's Fire Academy was honored last month as the "Outstanding New Career and Technical Education Teacher" in Pennsylvania by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Frazier was feted at the department's annual Career and Technical Education Week festivities in Harrisburg. Also honored were **Saul High School of Agricultural Sciences** and **Bok Technical High School**, which were among four schools, statewide, singled out as "Outstanding Career and Technical Education High Schools."

**Gilbert Spruance Elementary School** in the Northeast Region is proud to announce that the students in grades 3 to 8 have earned more than 1,000,000 stickers in First in Math. In addition, one seventh-grade class, led by **Michael Jones** in Room 214, has earned more than 100,000 alone.

**Amanda Urbanczyk**, sixth-grade teacher at Hill-Freedman Middle School, is the recent recipient of the Fulbright-Hayes Scholarship for a seminar titled "Exploring Origins of Communities." This summer, she will be traveling to New Zealand and Mongolia. In New Zealand, she will study its many cultures and its economy, history and geography as well as current issues there.



### Going "solo" with author

At a recent event for student writers, artists and musicians, **Carlos Carmona** (left) met **Steve Lopez**, author of this year's "One Book" selection, "The Soloist." This book is the basis for a new feature film.

**Feltonville School of Arts & Sciences** is bursting with pride that one of its students, **Carlos Carmona**, was the only middle school student chosen for an honorable mention in the recent "One Book, One Philadelphia" essay contest.

**A.S. Jenks Elementary School** conducted a successful *Pennies for Patients* campaign, raising more than \$700 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Almost every student and staff member paid \$1 for the opportunity to wear pajamas to school. These contributions supplemented the change deposited in the organization's coin boxes. "Pajama Day" boosted the already strong sense of community at A.S. Jenks while also supporting the fight against childhood leukemia and lymphoma.

Fourth graders from **Mindy Cohen's class** at **Cook-Wissahickon Elementary School**, along with Principal **Anna Jenkins**, were part of the live audience for a recent edition of NBC10's magazine-format daytime program, "10!" The show included a brief salute by **Transportation Services' Gerald Rineer** as part of a nationwide tribute to school bus drivers called "Love the Bus Month." With Rineer was **Cheryl Carlson**, who was representing all of the District's bus drivers.

**Potter Thomas Elementary School** hosted a recent media event for Fresh Artists, an organization which is providing grants for art supplies to the 149 School District teachers who applied for them in this the program's first full year of operation. The announcement of the first delivery of art supplies took place in teacher **Darren Umble's** classroom.

**Lincoln High School's** Special Education Coordinator **Linda Higman** reports that the school's recent College/Technical Institute Fair for special education students was a great success. A dozen colleges and technical schools participated. In other news from Lincoln, Mentor/Teacher **Linda McGreevy** notes that nine students researched, wrote and presented "RX: Laughter is the Best Medicine" at last month's fifth annual Annenberg High School Science Symposium at Lankenau Hospital.

Congratulations to **Moffet Elementary School**, whose overall school attendance was the highest in the Central East Region for January, and to **Ferguson Elementary School** for most improved attendance for the region in January. Principals **Olivia Dreibelbis** and **Sheila Drapiewski**, respectively, accepted the regional trophies at a recent principals' meeting.

**Master Gunnery Sergeant Andrew Worley** of Benjamin Franklin High School's Navy JROTC and his brother, **1st Sergeant Howard Worley** of Roxborough High School's Army JROTC, both accompanied their students at a junior leadership conference held last month at the Freedom Foundation in Valley Forge.

**Lieutenant Colonel (ret.) Keith M. Cianfrani**, the District's Director of Army JROTC, is the author of the safety watch column which appears every other month in *Rotor and Wing*, an international magazine. He also is a consultant to Fox 29 news on aviation safety-related matters and has given many newspaper interviews nationwide.

# Victory Garden

## Professional development offerings after school help build capacity and impact instruction

The Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL) has crafted and is delivering an after-school professional development series. The objectives are to build instructional capacity within the District and to more effectively and positively impact instruction, student learning and achievement. “Our children deserve the best. Access to quality instruction is a significant down payment on our commitment to them, their families and their future,” said Deputy for Teaching and Learning Linda Chen.

In collaboration with the regional superintendents, OTL designed these opportunities not only to build capacity within the regions but also to support schools as “professional learning communities.” The OTL-regional superintendents’ collaboration yielded a menu of job-embedded professional development sessions that guide daily instruction and improvement in order to support teaching and learning at schools.

The professional “growth” workshops are facilitated by highly skilled teacher leaders who foster learning and share their expertise with other educators. This endeavor is meant to break down the walls of isolation and to foster collaborative relationships between the OTL and schools, OTL and regions and teacher to teacher.

“Through these workshops, relationships are encouraged in order to restore the belief that by creating a community, the focus is

not only on the content of the curriculum, but also on the quality of connections between educators and students,” said English Language Arts Content Specialist Erin Medea. “We believe that when educators connect with each other, they can accomplish far more—as opposed to them working individually.”

Chen noted that teacher attendance is increasing, but added that, over time, she and her OTL colleagues have noticed that greater gains are achieved when school teams attend. “The school teams are transcending into ‘professional learning communities,’ applying best practices for enhancing student achievement,” said Elementary Education Director Joy Diljohn. “Instructional leaders support this initiative by compensating participants’ attendance, for they understand that professional learning communities do, indeed, work.”

Chen said that participation by school teams helps ensure that all students have access to a common sequence of standards-driven instruction leading to improvement. She promised that OTL will continue to offer additional sessions that will support rigorous instruction in and out of the classroom.

Just a small sampling of the courses offered so far are: Differentiated Instruction (a three-part series for both elementary and high school grades); Everyday Math and Math in Context Overview; Foss Kit Training for Grades 1–5; and Understanding the Adolescent.



## Faces and Facts

A salute to our School District’s unsung heroes and their work. This issue spotlights:

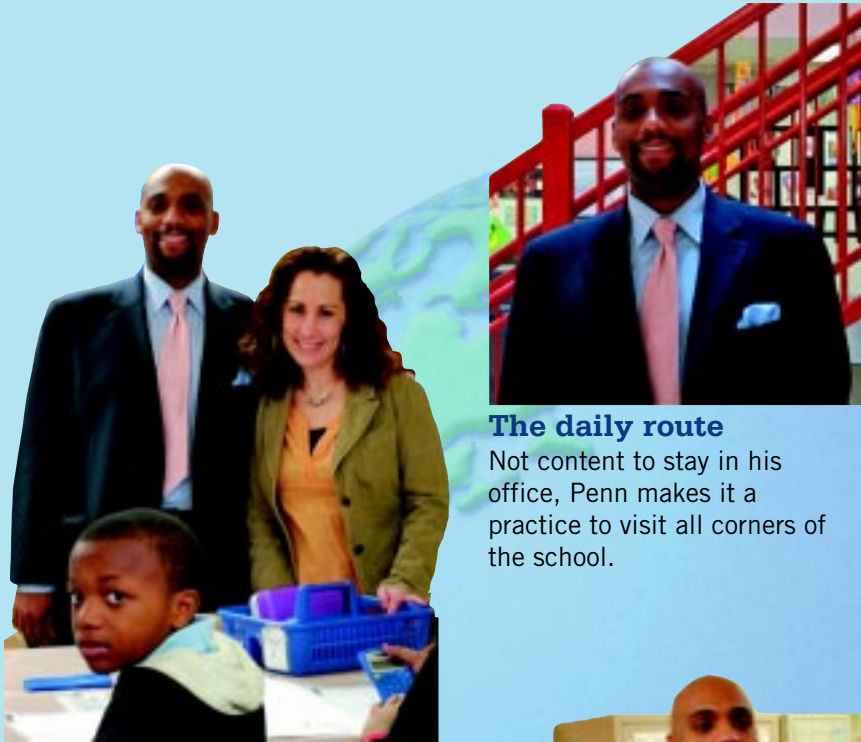


**Aimee Torres**, assistant teacher, McKinley Head Start Center, 2101 N. Orkney Street

**Aimee Torres** is the detail woman at McKinley Head Start. She arrives early each day and “makes sure that everything we need is organized and ready,” said Head Teacher Denise Ellis. Torres is also a role model for the parents of children at McKinley Head Start. When her daughter attended another School District Head Start center, Torres was a regular volunteer there. Staff recognized her potential and encouraged her to take the District’s test for assistant Head Start teacher. She not only passed, but she helped Ellis open up the then-new McKinley Head Start. That was 14 years ago, and they remain a close-working team. Ellis and McKinley Head Start parents have another reason for admiring Torres—her success as a mother. Her daughter is a graduate of McKinley and Masterman Schools and currently is studying at Temple University. “Anyone who comes in to the center knows how fantastic Aimee is,” Ellis emphasized. “Most important, she bonds with all the children. They love her!”

# Where in the world is Ed Penn, principal?

Ask someone who knows anything about K-12 education, “What is the first ingredient in creating a great school?” The answer most likely will be “a great principal.” After all, principals are the CEOs of their schools. Aply assisted in the District’s larger schools by assistant principals, men and women like Ed Penn at Thurgood Marshall Elementary School are leading the way to success for every student.



## The daily route

Not content to stay in his office, Penn makes it a practice to visit all corners of the school.

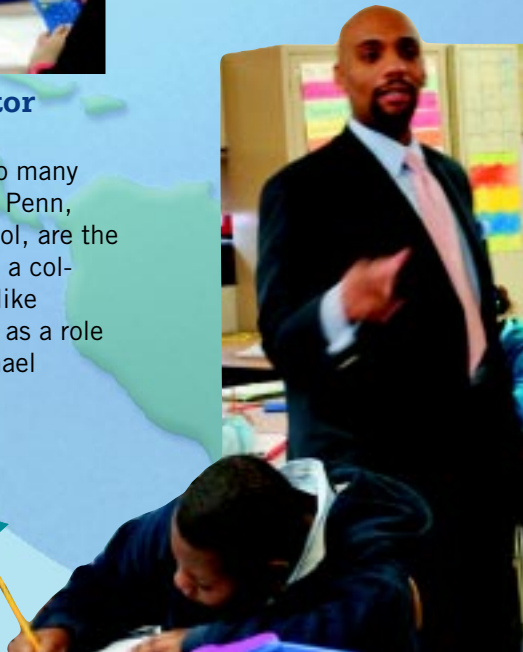
## Pacesetter, collaborator and role model

Principals are many things to many people at their schools. Like Penn, they set the tone at the school, are the school’s instructional leader, a collaborator with the teachers, like Kimberly Piscopo, and serve as a role model for students like Michael Whitehead (foreground).



## Accessible to students

Students don’t view Penn as someone you just see in the principal’s office when there is a problem. He is in charge, but accessible to all—students, staff members and parents. Here, he pauses to greet Letisha Feliciano and Alexis McDaniels-Brooks.



## Victory is in the classroom

That is why this energetic educator makes stopping by classrooms the core of his daily “walk around.”

## Where in the world are YOU?

In future issues, don’t be surprised if our Core Team camera bugs catch you as you go about YOUR work on behalf of our children.